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# (UN)MATCHED: RACIALIZED NARRATIVES OF U.S.-BASED JAPANESE MEN, MASCULINITY, AND HETEROSEXUALITY IN ONLINE DATING APPS

**by**

**KEISUKE KIMURA**

B.A. English Language and Literature, Waseda University, 2015
M.A. American Culture Studies, Bowling Green State University, 2018

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**
**Ph.D. Communication**

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**July 2022**

**DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my seven interviewees, whose trust and emotional/time commitment made this project possible. Their narratives — voices, feelings, and experiences of online dating helped me to better understand how U.S.-based Japanese men's day-to-day interactions are affected by the historical continuum and social structures of power such as whiteness, Japaneseness, patriarchy, cisheteronormativity, and capitalism. Their often unheard and overlooked voices pushed me to rethink my own privilege and to critically examine the intersecting politics of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality within the spectrum of privilege and marginalization.

This dissertation is also dedicated to all the U.S.-based Japanese who continue to experience racialized, gendered, and sexualized interactions in and across everyday contexts.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would sincerely like to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation to Dr. Shinsuke Eguchi, my academic advisor and dissertation committee chair for the enormous support and guidance throughout my years as a Ph.D. student at the University of New Mexico. Your continuous mentorship, relentless support, invaluable insights, patience, and critical love pushed me further to grow as a better scholar, educator, and person. You taught me the importance of accounting for our bodies and embracing vulnerability, honesty, and reflexivity in scholarship. As an international Japanese doctoral student, I am extremely honored and privileged to work with you and to be a part of your academic family. 心より感謝申し上げます！

I also want to extend my sincere appreciation to my dissertation committee members: Dr. Ilia Rodríguez, Dr. Yangsun Hong, and Dr. Rona Tamiko Halualani. To Dr. Rodríguez, I benefitted immensely from your insightful methodological guidance in developing who I am as a scholar. In every long-hour meeting, you have been extremely patient with me and your constructive feedback helped me to better organize/structure the logical flow of my thought processes and writing. Thank you very much for all of your time, support, and encouragement during my academic journey. To Dr. Hong, I learned so much from your critical, intersectional, and methodological contributions particularly in cultivating my understanding of intersectionality and what critical scholarship means. I cannot thank you enough for your kindness and solidarity in surviving during tumultuous times amid the COVID-19 pandemic. To Dr. Halualani, it has been such an honor to work with you through this dissertation project. Your knowledge and scholarly commitment inspired me to ground myself in Critical Intercultural Communication. Thank you very much for always being kind,

encouraging, and believing in my scholarship. I am incredibly humbled by the opportunity to work with you all and privileged to have such a supportive team. The completion of my dissertation and program would not have been possible without your continuous support, encouragement, and guidance.

I also want to extend a sincere note of gratitude to the Department of Communication and Journalism at the University of New Mexico where has provided me academic guidance and opportunities to grow as a critical scholar-teacher throughout my time as a Ph.D. student and instructor of record. I would specifically like to thank Dr. David Weiss, Dr. Tamar Ginossar, Dr. Michael Lechuga, Dr. Marco Briziarelli, Dr. Kathy Isaacson, Dr. Jaelyn deMaría, Dr. Susana Martinez Guillem, Dr. Cleophas Muneri, Dr. Evan Ashworth, Dr. Mohammad Yousuf, Heidi Ricci, Lore Giese, Maria Hazel Mendoza Jayme, Michelle Baca, and Nicole Monet Lovato who I have closely worked with through graduate courses, teaching, departmental events, and administrative processes. Beyond the department, I would like to thank Dr. Kency Cornejo and Dr. Antonio T. Tiongson, Jr. for directing me with your scholarly expertise in decolonial theories/methodologies and Asian American Studies. All of your scholarly/pedagogical mentorship and academic support have guided me immensely since my first day in the program. Furthermore, I would also like to thank former department faculty members, Dr. Mary Jane Collier and Dr. Myra S. Washington for their exceptional academic guidance.

Importantly, I must acknowledge that I could not go through (or I should say, survive) this academic journey without the support, encouragement, and patience of my colleagues, scholar-friends, and mentors. Thank you Dr. Lisa K. Hanasono and Dr. Satoshi Toyosaki for being amazing mentors. Your continuous support, patience, and compassion have been

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## ABSTRACT

In this study, I documented and examined U.S.-based Japanese men's narratives about their day-to-day experiences in and across online dating contexts. Through the analysis of narratives, I critiqued how multilayered differences (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and more) working with dominant social structures affect their everyday experiences within the spectrum of power, privilege, and marginalization in the transnational space. Specifically, the overarching purposes and goals of this study were to better understand U.S.-based Japanese men's online dating experiences and to critique the relationalities of how Japanese men's narratives (i.e., micro-level context) and their beliefs/attitudes within and between cultural communities (i.e., meso-level context) allude to the macro-level structures of power such as whiteness, Japaneseness, hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy, cisheteronormativity, and capitalism. Overall, this study elucidated the historical continuum of power and politics of identity, culture, and space/place pertaining to U.S.-based Japanese men through the lens of Critical Intercultural Communication research.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

**Problem Statement**

Online dating has become a global phenomenon in how people seek romantic and sexual relationships in our contemporary society (Chan, 2021). As of April 2021, more than 234 million people use online dating services and the number of users will likely increase by approximately 280 million worldwide in 2024 (Tankovska, 2021). For seeking romantic and sexual relationships, online dating apps have rapidly become a popular space of interpersonal communication in our everyday life. It offers a relatively convenient and accessible platform to meet with potential romantic and sexual partners through a simple act of *liking* or *swiping* profiles on mobile phones. In this regard, participation in online dating can occur using mobile phones anytime and anywhere. With their user-friendly surface, online dating apps have been opening up possibilities for many people to seek relationships beyond various relational boundaries and differences such as racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, national, international, religious, political, and more (Chan, 2021).

The U.S. is one of the top revenues for online dating services in the world with increasing consumption of U.S.-based mobile apps such as Tinder, Bumble, OkCupid, Grindr, and more. However, Asian and Asian American men have often been stereotyped, rejected, and excluded in heterosexual online dating interactions in the U.S. A study conducted by the co-founder of OkCupid, Christian Rudder demonstrated a statistically significant pattern in heterosexual online dating preferences. According to Rudder (2014), there was a persistent pattern that Asian men are one of the least desirable racial and gender groups in heterosexual online dating. While the data broadly categorizes OkCupid users into four racial groups such as White, Black, Latino/a, and Asian and the ethnicities of each racial

group are not specified, users' patterned racial preferences in heterosexual online dating illuminated how racial and gender identities are important vectors for participants to choose their romantic and sexual partners. Referring to Rudder's (2014) statistics, Kao et al. (2018) reiterated that Asian American men are socially excluded from heterosexual romantic relationships. They found a trait where Asian men tend to be less attractive on heterosexual online dating websites. Additionally, the lack of attraction mirrors the larger sociohistorical context of emasculation and exclusion where Asian men are consistently stereotyped (e.g., Eng, 2001; Han, 2015; Nguyen, 2014; Ono & Pham, 2009; Shimizu, 2012). For example, Asian men are often stereotyped as lacking white hetero-masculine aesthetics and performance and thus lacking attraction (Kao et al., 2018). As Chan (2021) noted on the relational possibilities of online dating, online dating sites offer multiple avenues, chances, and accessibilities to meet with potential romantic partners, breaking through the relational boundaries and differences and creating a more inclusive space for people to develop interpersonal relationships. Simultaneously, I emphasize that online dating is also a space of exclusion where it is not free from multiple and multilayered inequalities and social injustice. Certain people are discounted or not preferred as romantic or sexual partners because of stereotypes and prejudices associated with particular race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and more. In the case of Asian identity, studies by Rudder (2014) and Kao et al. (2018) asserted that discrimination against Asian men is an ongoing social issue in the online dating space.

The study of online dating has been significantly popular since the 2010s, and there are a significant number of studies conducted through a social scientific approach. Those studies examine users' demographics, dating preferences, risks, mental health, and relational

2

management in academic fields such as Psychology and Sociology (Chan, 2021). Other studies use a qualitative approach to study online dating (e.g., Couch & Liamputtong, 2008; Fitzpatrick & Birnholtz, 2017; Hobbs et al., 2017). However, given the increasing number of studies, examinations of users' lived experiences in online dating are still limited in Communication research. Thus, this study adds to the growing number of research that examine users' racialized experiences on various dating websites. Importantly, this essay complicates the lived experiences of heterosexual Asian men in the U.S. online dating contexts. How heterosexual Asian men understand, experience, and present their identities in their everyday online dating interactions needs further scholarly attention.

The racial category of *Asian* obscures nuances and meaningful differences of Asian ethnicities; hence, it is not a singular concept (e.g., Eguchi, 2013; Espiritu, 1992; Nakayama, 2004; Sekimoto, 2014). For example, Nakayama (2004) stated that Asian/Americans are *dis/oriented* between the myth of homogenous *Asian* identity and the reality of heterogeneity and complex ethnic differences. Further contextualizing this idea of dis/orientation, Sekimoto (2014) analyzed the socially, physically, and spatially shifting identity of being and becoming *Asian* in the transnational context. Through her transnational migratory experiences between Japan and the U.S., she articulated how the racialization of *Asianness* simultaneously orients and disorients her cultural being. At the same time, Eguchi (2020) questioned and critiqued the essentialist discourse of Asian gender and sexuality, particularly through the contexts of gay Asian men and masculinity. In particular, he examined the politics of sticky rice — an Asian man dating another Asian man — through queerness to challenge the dominant structures of gay sexual cultures informed by whiteness. On the note of essentialist discourse, he reiterated the fluidity and multiplicity of the racial category *Asian*

that should and must be interrogated far from monolithic. As Eguchi (2020), Nakayama (2004), and Sekimoto (2014) stressed, the racialization of *Asian* dis/orients the everyday life of Asian/American people.

Reviewing the politics and racialization of Asians, I understand that not every Asian man experiences online dating interactions in the same way. Rather, Asian men experience their online dating interactions in a myriad of ways through their intersecting identities of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and more. Therefore, as a critical cultural communication scholar originally from Japan, I am interested in examining the narratives of cisgender heterosexual Japanese men. I situate Japanese men's narratives as a part of the larger Asian/American racial and racialized experience in the online dating space. Specifically, I investigate how Japanese men who identify as cisgender heterosexuals narrate their masculinities and heterosexualities intersecting with racial/ethnic identities in online dating interactions in light of the historical continuum of the U.S. racial formation. In this study, I define Japanese men are those who were born in Japan, and later came to the U.S. as migrants with various immigrant statuses such as legal or conditional permanent resident and non-immigrants with student and temporary worker visas. This means, the Japanese men in this study are people who are born in Japan and later moved to the U.S.

This project engages with cisgender heterosexual Japanese men in the U.S. who are often racialized as Asian/Americans. By the use of "/" (slash) for Asian/Americans, I mean the simultaneous indication of two terms, equivalent to the meaning of *and/or*. In this way, I indicate Asian/Americans as both Asians *and/or* Asian Americans. This is an important distinction to make because there is no clear distinction between Asians and Asian Americans in the everyday context of U.S. racialization. According to Kawai (2005), "Racial

stereotypes of the yellow race do not distinguish yellows here from yellows there — Asian Americans from Asians, Chinese from Japanese, or Koreans from Vietnamese; that is, stereotyping Asian Americans is both Asian *and* American" (p. 111, emphasis in original). Thus, my use of slash symbolizes an inclusive approach for articulating the subject group of this study as well as an overarching contribution of this study within Asian/American discourses.

I concur with Palumbo-Liu's (1999) distinction of slash which "instantiates a choice between two terms, their simultaneous and equal status, and an element of indecidability … as it at once implies both exclusion and inclusion" (p. 1). Here, *indecidability* is a key vector because, for example, the differing lines between Asians and Asian Americans, Japanese and Asians, and Japanese and Asian Americans are ambiguous in everyday interactions in the U.S. This means a person who is of Asian descent is racialized as Asian and can also be racialized as Asian American, and vice versa. Asian Americans can also be positioned as simply Asians who are considered *foreigners* or *aliens* (Nakayama, 2004; Tuan, 1998). For example, I am a Japanese citizen who voluntarily migrated to the U.S.; however, I have been asked by others multiple times "are you Asian?" and "are you Asian American?" since I came to the U.S. My experience of being racialized as an Asian/American in the U.S. demonstrates the *indecidability* between Asians and Asian Americans in the everyday context.

My interest in the topic for this project emerged from my lived experiences of seeking heterosexual romantic relationships in online dating sites in the U.S. Drawing from my own experiences is important because it allows centralizing my body as a researcher within this study. As McIntosh and Eguchi (2020) urged to rethink "*the body as a central platform of*

*knowledge and analysis* in Intercultural Communication," (p. 399; emphasis in original). I

value the lived experiences of the body to critique social systems of power because their

micro/meso-level everyday knowledge is the living proof, evidence, and materiality of the

macro-level structures of the society. In so doing, I situate my experience as one of the

examples to support the claim of the online dating space as a site of inclusion/exclusion that

reproduces, perpetuates, and resists the dominant matrix of power such as whiteness,

hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy, cisheteronormativity, and capitalism (Chan, 2021).

In my heterosexual online dating experiences, I have participated in the apps such as

Tinder, Bumble, and Pairs. Tinder and Bumble are U.S.-based online dating services through

a mobile phone app launched in 2012 and 2014. As of 2021, both apps are the two largest

platforms in the U.S. market share (Curry, 2021). Pairs is a Japanese-born online dating app

launched in 2012 which mainly targets the consumption of Japanese users. Pairs has been

growing its domestic and international popularity, recorded the highest consumer spend in

Japan, and ranked 5th among other online dating apps in the world in 2019 (Huang, 2020).

All of these apps require users to create a profile with their pictures and bio. They allow users

to swipe their screens right or left to like or dislike other people's profiles. Users can start

exchanging text messages once people are *matched*, meaning both users liked each other's

profiles.

Through my journey of seeking romantic relationships on Tinder, Bumble, and Pairs,

I have experienced a gap in terms of how I can(not) *match* with others on certain apps. For

example, I first started using Tinder and Bumble to meet with people outside of academia

and possibly find a long-term romantic relationship when I was an M.A. student in Ohio.

However, I have had difficulties *matching* with others on both Tinder and Bumble. Because I

cannot start building any relationships without *matching*, I felt that I was not even participating in online dating by rarely getting mutual likes on these apps. Later during my Ph.D. degree in New Mexico, I had a video chat with two Japanese male friends (one lives in Japan and the other lives in the U.S.) and they introduced me to Pairs, explaining how it has been a valuable online dating app for them in seeking relationships. With their recommendations, I decided to create an account on Pairs. Surprisingly and interestingly, after a few days of using Pairs, I could *match* with multiple people who are Japanese residing in the U.S. But simultaneously, most of the people I *matched* with were living in Hawai'i or coastal areas such as California and New York. Living in New Mexico and pursuing my Ph.D. degree, being geographically distant from such locations made the relationship more difficult for me to maintain and cultivate. Therefore, even if I could *match* with others, seeking romantic relationships on Pairs was still a somewhat unrealistic or unattainable desire to me. Sean Rad, one of the founders of Tinder said, "We always saw Tinder, the interface, as a game" (Stampler, 2014, para. 19). Just like playing cards in the mobile app, the dating app is described as a game. But I often ask myself, "am I even in this game?"

Reflecting on my *matching* experiences on Tinder, Bumble, and Pairs, I felt a sense of failure seeking relationships in U.S.-based online dating apps by failing to *match* with others on Tinder and Bumble. I could *match* with others in a Japanese-born online dating app, Pairs; however, building romantic relationships from those *matches* was difficult due to the geographical inaccessibility. In both cases, I have been failing to achieve my desire of seeking romantic relationships. In these processes, I have also realized that this sense of failure assumes the normative idea of what is successful in online dating participation. Hence, my lived experiences of difficulty in online dating resonate with what Rudder (2014)

and Kao et al. (2018) asserted about the exclusion of Asian/American men from building romantic relationships in heterosexual online dating. As a Japanese man who is racialized as an Asian/American man in the U.S., my struggling experience in the online dating space speaks to the larger historical, cultural, and political contexts of racialized Asian men in the U.S.

Masequesmay and Metzger (2009) discussed the sociohistorically constructed institutions of Asian/American gender and sexuality and maintained, as follows:

> Asian/American men still experience discrimination through the perception that they cannot fulfill the role of "real men" in the U.S. society. Asian/American men might fare well economically, but sexually they are seen as undesirable and, therefore, not really "masculine" men. (p. 8)

The understandings of being *real* and *masculine* men are learned and controlled by the notion of hegemonic masculinity which generally refers to a white, middle/upper-class, heterosexual, tall, and muscled male as the ideal quality of men (Chou, 2012; Chou et al., 2012; Iwamoto & Liu, 2009). Within the discourse of hegemonic masculinity, non-White men and masculinities are considered less ideal than Whites (Chou et al., 2015). Being positioned as less ideal, Asian/American men are racialized as not manly/masculine enough (i.e., feminized and desexualized); hence, undesirable (Chou, 2012; Masequesmay & Metzger, 2009; Shimizu, 2012; Washington, 2016). This issue is a part of the history of belonging, disenfranchisement, and racialization of Asian/American men in the U.S. Connecting my experiences with the historical, cultural, and political contexts of Asian/American racialization drove me to examine narratives of U.S.-based Japanese men in the online dating space. Because my experience only showcases a glimpse of Japanese men

navigating through the online dating space, examining multiple narratives helps me to better understand what kind of unique and patterned voices are persistent for cisgender heterosexual Japanese men in U.S. online dating. Importantly, while Asian/American scholarship highlights the sociohistorical context of oppression and discrimination against Asian/American men, I also must account for the privileged positionalities of cisgender heterosexual Japanese and Asian/American men in the U.S. patriarchal society. Thus, in this study, I look into the contradicting, nuanced, and complex positionalities and relationalities of U.S.-based Japanese men in online dating.

As I review literature about Asian/Americans, I realized that narratives about cisgender Japanese men, masculinity, and sexuality are still understudied. Specifically, I highlight that the discursive practices of heterosexuality need to be problematized and challenged within Asian/American literature. The issue to be articulated is the assumption of heterosexuality as a fixed and stable social construction that all heterosexual people experience the level of privilege in the same way. I question this stability of heterosexuality that does not invite the fluidity, multiplicity, and spectrum to understand (hetero)sexuality. Heterosexuality is, indeed, privileged status in the U.S. heteronormativity where the sociohistorical systems and structures that normalize heterosexuality is *the* ideal and universal (Chou, 2012; Han, 2015; Yep, 2003/2017). However, heterosexual Asian/American men are often positioned or belonged to the oppressed category by being excluded from heterosexual romantic relationships in the online dating space (Kao et al., 2018; Rudder, 2014). Asian/American men experience disenfranchisement even within the structure of heterosexuality. In this vein, Asian/American men who are heterosexual do not always benefit from the structures of heteronormativity. However, their positionalities are

contradicting because they are already privileged of being cisgender and heterosexual within the U.S. patriarchy. Being (or positioned as) Asian/Americans also insinuates the racial hierarchy in relation to other minority racial/ethnic groups in the U.S. because of the logic of the model minority stereotypes associated with Asian bodies. This issue of heterosexuality illuminates the nuanced experiences of heterosexual Asian/American men as inhibiting the intersections of both privilege and oppression through their contradicting positionalities and relationalities with others.

**Significance & Goals of Study**

In this research, I am interested in the politics of identity – particularly, complicating the understanding of the lived experiences of the U.S.-based Japanese cisgender men engaging with the U.S. hegemonic notions of racialized masculinity and heterosexuality in the online dating space. More specifically, I study relationships between the lived experiences of the U.S.-based Japanese men and the U.S. historical/structural forces that sustain dominant ideologies such as whiteness, racialization, patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and cisheteronormativity (Chou, 2012; Kim, 2010; McIntosh et al., 2018; Nakayama & Martin, 2000; Shimizu, 2012). As I design this research, I realized that the study of online dating, identities, and cultures can cover a wide range of scholarly approaches and emphases from various fields to analyze self-presentation, romantic/sexual expression, health, violence, marketing strategies, algorithm, and more. This study can be very big, broad, and studied from many different perspectives.

However, I primarily orient my theoretical and methodological positions in Critical Intercultural Communication to examine this topic. Critical Intercultural Communication is the discipline of human interactions which elucidates "issues of power, context, socio-

economic relations and historical/structural forces as constituting and shaping culture and intercultural communication encounters, relationships, and contexts" (Halualani & Nakayama, 2010, p. 1). It is an arena of inquiry that focuses on critiquing (imbalanced) power dynamics of communication across differences that pervade our everyday lives in a variety of contexts (Halualani, 2019). Hence, I intend the primary reader of this study to be scholars in Critical Intercultural Communication who are interested in interrogating the politics of identity. Readers may particularly be interested in examining the issues of gender and sexuality in Critical Intercultural Communication because this topic complicates the understanding of the dominant ideas of masculinity and heterosexuality. Thus, while this study can be viewed from various academic perspectives, I am speaking with the particular readership (i.e., Critical Intercultural Communication scholars) as I conduct and write this research. Next, I detail the reason why I focus on the politics of identity to look at this topic that can be very broad and studied in multiple ways. In so doing, I propose four points as the key significance and goals of this study.

As I examine the identity politics in online dating, I envision the significance of this study as follows. First, this project examines historically saturated and culturally specific nuances of Japanese men in the U.S. This research not only analyzes how the macro-level structures of power such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and nation shape the subjective lived experiences of U.S.-based Japanese men in online dating. But it also examines how the narratives emerged from online dating experiences of Japanese men (i.e., micro-level context) and Japanese men's beliefs and attitudes within and between cultural communities (i.e., meso-level context) allude to the macro-level structures of power. I listened to voices for generating a better understanding of Japanese men's narratives as the

testimony of sociohistorical consequences within the U.S. cultural and social structures. As Halualani and Nakayama (2010) contended, I am methodologically committed to look into macro, meso, and micro dimensions of culture, identity, and power (see also, Sorrells, 2010; Willink et al., 2014; Yep et al., 2019). I am interested in analyzing "the ways in which larger structures of power (governmental, institutional, legal, economic, and mediated forces) intermingle with microacts and encounters among/within cultural actors and groups" (p. 3). In this vein, I engage with Critical Intercultural Communication by analyzing Japanese men's narratives through the examination of macro/meso/micro-power structures.

Second, I am interested in challenging how the dominant ideas of masculinity and heterosexuality shape nuances, complexities, and contradictions of identity positionalities that are structured and formed by the dominant matrix of power, ideologies, contexts, and sociocultural groups/members in everyday encounters. For example, the U.S. societal structure of patriarchy provides privileges to cisgender men. But the patriarchy working with the logic of whiteness also marginalizes Japanese cisgender men. They are often positioned as not masculine enough under the dominant idea of masculinity in U.S. social constructions of identity. Subsequently, existing scholarship highlighted the historical feminization and hyposexualization of Asian/American men in the U.S. racial formation (Chou, 2012; Masequesmay & Metzger, 2009; Shimizu, 2012). This includes but is not limited to the racialization of Japanese men as Asian/American. However, it is also important to mention that not every Asian/American man is feminized nor hyposexualized in relation to the dominant notions of masculinity and what it means to be a man. Here, I stress that Japanese men's experiences are not either-or (e.g., masculine or feminine; feminized or not feminized; privileged or marginalized). Rather, their experiences embody many contradictions and

12

unstable positionalities in relation to others within the spectrum of privilege and marginalization in everyday contexts. Thus, I paid careful and extra attention to the lived experiences of Japanese men and how they understand and embody these positionalities. By challenging how race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality systems shape everyday experiences, I examined how Japanese men identify, understand, and practice racialized masculinity and heterosexuality.

In this way, I am also entering into the arena of Critical Intercultural Communication where the issues of gender, sexuality, and intersectionality are dynamically discussed. For example, a queer and performative paradigm has further shifted a theoretical and methodological spectrum in Intercultural Communication research (e.g., Calafell, 2021; Yep et al., 2019). Specifically, a queer perspective in Intercultural Communication research pushed the field to critically examine the issues of gender, sexuality, and power intersecting with other social institutions such as race, ethnicity, class, nationality, and more. For example, scholars such as Asante (2016), Atay (2015), Eguchi and Calafell (2020), and Yep et al. (2019) oriented a queer perspective as a new, alternative, and transgressive way to advocate for social justice and create space for queer lives. Specifically, they problematized and challenged the institutional norms, normalized systems, and assumed to be stable or invisible universality of everyday practices (e.g., whiteness, patriarchy, cisheteronormativity, and gender/sexual binaries) that control and marginalize queer lives and contexts.

While the emergence of a critical approach in Intercultural Communication research has been a significant shift in examining structures of imbalanced power in a variety of contexts, a queer turn has illuminated how the discourses of gender and sexuality have not been the central focus in Critical Intercultural Communication. Yep (2003/2017) asserted that

the issues of gender and sexuality have historically been silenced, neglected, or left out in the Communication discipline. This statement still persists in today's Critical Intercultural Communication scholarship (see also, Eguchi & Calafell, 2020). Eguchi (2016) also insisted that the studies on "sexuality and communication overlooked the effects of culture on sexuality; and, simultaneously, … intercultural communication scholarship ignored the critical and crucial roles of sexuality and sex/gender in processes and practices of cultural identity" (p. 292). Importantly, a queer paradigm in Critical Intercultural Communication underscores the significance of an intersectional approach in unpacking the issues of gender, sex, and sexuality because they cannot and must not be separated from the relationship with other social institutions, discourses of identity, and culture.

Mapping the disciplinary shift and development of Intercultural Communication, Bernadette Marie Calafell (2021), editor of the *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, acknowledged the need for academic commitment to inclusivity which should and must include gender and sexuality in Communication scholarship. However, research that focuses on gender and sexuality continues to receive lukewarm reception in the field (Chávez, 2013). The effects are the lack of intersectional analysis on pertinent topics relevant to Critical Intercultural Communication. As evidenced by the work of Calafell (2021) and Eguchi (2016), a performative paradigm is a turn to situate the everyday experiences of the body in concrete time and space. On the note of the performative paradigm, Calafell (2021) articulated that, "historically marginalized communities often communicate and theorize through the everyday or the performative" (p. 1). A performative turn in Intercultural Communication helps scholars to emphasize the everyday and lived experiences of the body. Attending to these points and the genealogy of Intercultural

14

Communication, my goal is to add the body of knowledge about people's everyday

interactions in the online dating space where communication can take place both physically

and virtually. I detail this addition to the scholarship in the next point.

Third, I draw on some elements of Media Studies to illuminate the digitally mediated

platforms of interpersonal intercultural communication facilitated through online dating apps.

In other words, this study showcases how the digital intervention expands, circumscribes,

and complicates the ways in which we communicate in and across everyday contexts. In the

case of interpersonal intercultural communication in the online dating platform, users usually

initiate their conversation through text messages. Then, they may eventually meet in person

as they develop their romantic/sexual relationships. Thus, the online platform is a

transformative space of inquiry which consists of both physical and virtual communication

occuring in sequence or at the same time through the processes of romantic/sexual

relationship building. In addition to in-person communication in the physical space, the

virtual space also constitutes a site where the everyday lived experiences are virtually

embodied within certain social structures. Yet, it is still a nascent space to further interrogate

politics of identity in Critical Intercultural Communication research. Therefore, I hope to

extend the existing scholarship of Critical Intercultural Communication studies in order to fill

the gap in conversing everyday human interactions that are simultaneously occurring in the

physical and virtual space.

In so doing, this research pays attention to the way U.S.-based Japanese men

experience and make sense of the politics of identity as they participate in their online dating

platforms. In light of these unique online dating systems and cultures, this research can

elucidate how the users (i.e., U.S.-based Japanese men) (sub)consciously make decisions on

choosing their potential romantic/sexual partners in online dating. While the primary focus is on the politics of identity, I recognize the significance of the ways in which interrogating how algorithmic calculations interfere with communication in and across digital media platforms. Therefore, this project can suggest or point to how a certain group of people experiences algorithms in the online dating space. As an example of how people experience algorithms, the users can find the *best* match possible based on the similarities and complementarity among all users' profile information through the algorithmic recommendations (Tong et al., 2016). But this study does not focus on the algorithm system and how it works in online dating. Rather, it illuminates the users' lived experiences through the interview of their understandings of the algorithms and their interference when they participate in online dating.

At the same time, I keep in mind that each online dating app has its own format and culture that intermediate romantic/sexual relationships among users. Some apps may rely on algorithms to determine potential matches for the users. Some apps may allow users to browse, filter, and select profiles based on the users' preferences. Some apps may combine these formats to create matches. Moreover, in terms of the culture of each online dating site, specific apps are marketed toward specific groups of people. Tinder's basic service is inclusive for everyone who is seeking relationships based on users' romantic/sexual orientations and preferences. BLK is geared toward Black singles. EME Hive is exclusive to Asian American and Asian diaspora community with the purpose of Asian dating (i.e., Asian people dating Asian people). These are only a few examples of many heterosexual online dating sites to illustrate how each online dating app carries distinctive cultures based on its targeted users and intended purposes. Here, I assert that academic discourses on how a

person's romantic/sexual decision-making is affected by online dating systems, algorithms, and culture have not thoroughly been discussed in Critical Intercultural Communication. Thus, looking into the online dating space itself also expands the scholarship of Critical Intercultural Communication.

Fourth, this study builds a relational view about issues and concerns of Japanese/Americans, Asian/American racialization, masculinities, and heterosexualities in the U.S that is rooted in Critical Intercultural Communication. By relational, I mean that this study contributes as a part of and cannot be separated from the larger academic conversations about Asian/American race, gender, and sexuality systems. Working with scholarship through a variety of fields would help me to make sense of contradictions and relationalities in identity politics — how culturally different beliefs, practices, and meanings are shared, divided, and contested in our world where the notion of culture consistently shifts (Martin, 2015). Hence, it also has the potential to make contributions to interdisciplinary fields such as Asian Studies, Asian American Studies, Gender/Sexuality Studies, and Sociology. Therefore, this study is an interdisciplinary project examined through the lens of Critical Intercultural Communication. In what follows, I present research questions to address what issues to be studied and specific inquiries to be answered in this research.

**Research Questions**

To achieve the goals and significance of this study, I propose four major research questions that guide my approach to the topic of inquiry. First, I ask, what are the experiences of Japanese men participating in heterosexual online dating? As I am interested in complicating the understanding of the lived experiences of cisgender heterosexual Japanese men participating in online dating, the first research question attempts to identify

17

what kind of narratives about their uses and goals with online dating emerge from Japanese

men. Second, how do Japanese men present their identities and make sense of their identity

presentations in online dating? Because I believe that not all cisgender Japanese men view,

embody, and practice their identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality in the same

way, the second research question elucidates how Japanese men account for their identities

themselves and with others in the online dating platform. Third, how do transnational

transitions to the U.S. shape Japanese men's experience of online dating through living in the

liminal space? Growing up in Japan and later moved to the U.S., their experiences are not

simply situated either in Japan or the U.S. Rather, their everyday living are *dis/oriented* in the

liminal space in-between Japan and the U.S. (Eguchi, 2015; Nakayama, 2004; Sekimoto,

2014; Toyosaki, 2016) Thus, this research question illuminates how their perspectives and

experiences on dating, gender, and sexuality have shifted as their bodies move in and across

cultural spaces. Fourth, how do U.S.-based Japanese men's dating experiences alter, shape,

and reify racialized gender and sexual politics associated with ongoing sociohistorical issues

of Asian/American identities? The fourth research question specifically interrogates the

social structures of power that shape the everyday lives of Japanese men in the U.S. racial

formation. Thus, these questions allow me to better understand and examine the challenges,

contradictions, and relationalities of their racialized experiences in and across everyday

contexts. Simultaneously, I gather the micro/meso-level experiences of Japanese men in

order to consider how macro-level structures inform and shape their everyday interactions.

Altogether, each question is structured to guide my analysis of the text. Answering the

proposed research questions helps me to complicate the understanding of the lived

experiences of the U.S.-based Japanese cisgender men engaging with dominant structures of

power such as whiteness, racialization, patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and cisheteronormativity in the online dating space.

In exploring lived experiences of U.S.-based Japanese men in online dating, the rest of this dissertation is followed by four chapters: Theoretical grounds, methodology, findings and analysis, and discussion and conclusion. Chapter II (theoretical grounds) consists of the historical overview of Japanese im/migrants in the U.S., Asian/American gender and sexuality, and online space and dating to provide the macro-level structures of knowledge to support the historical understanding of the studied group. This chapter also provides the literature review of the theoretical frameworks of whiteness and racialized gender, (hetero)sexuality, and relationalities that orient my analysis and interpretation/critique of Japanese men's narratives. Chapter III (methodology) introduces my paradigmatic positionality and methodological design/process for conducting this qualitative research. Chapter IV (findings and analysis) documents interviewees' narratives and showcases the findings and analysis of their intersectional accounts of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Chapter V (discussion and conclusion) reflects on the overall process and synthesis of conducting this study including theoretical/methodological implications, followed by my concluding thoughts.

**CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL GROUNDS**

This chapter first provides the brief historical grounds and academic conversations of Japanese im/migration in the U.S., Asian/American gender and sexuality, and online space and dating to underscore how the larger historical, cultural, and political forces (i.e., macro-level structures of knowledge) are interconnected to the lived experiences of Japanese men (i.e., micro/meso-level context) in this study. Subsequently, I introduce theoretical frameworks that guide my interpretation and analysis of the lived experiences of U.S.-based Japanese men in heterosexual online dating. Overall, the purpose of this chapter is to illustrate existing scholarship and theoretical perspectives related to the topic and design of this study in the form of literature review.

**Historical Grounds**

***Japanese Im/migration in the U.S.***

In examining U.S.-based Japanese men's lived experiences, it is important to revisit the historical context of Japanese/Asian migration. Today, Asian bodies are continuously positioned in the paradoxical relationality between the stereotypes of being the *model minority* and *yellow peril* as a product of the historical construction of the Asian race and racialization in the U.S. (e.g., Eguchi & Ding, 2017; Kawai, 2005; Kimura, 2021a). The model minority myth is referred to as the stereotypical traits of Asian/Americans who are "highly self-reliant, economically successful, and politically non-resisting" (Chua & Fujino, 1999, p. 395). With the framing of a successful model image for other minoritarians, Asian/Americans are often considered *honorary white* or *nearly white* (Tuan, 1998). This does not mean that Asian/Americans are free from racialized systems of inequality. However, the model minority stereotype is strategically constructed in the U.S. during the civil rights

movement to conceal the realities of racial discrimination among minority groups of people,

producing the color-blind racist discourse to legitimize racial discrimination (Kawai, 2005).

As Nishime (2012) argued, the Asian race is "mobilized rhetorically to naturalize and

obscure racial inequalities" (p. 98). For example, Iwamoto and Liu (2009) described the

colonial logic of the model minority myth as a *glass ceiling*. Because Asian/Americans are

considered as economically and socially successful figures, they are seemingly free from

oppression and have opportunities to go up to higher social orders (e.g., you can see the

success through a transparent ceiling and the successful position seems attainable). However,

in reality, they cannot go beyond the ceiling. This metaphor of the *glass ceiling* represents

the systemic positionality of Asian/Americans as subordinate to Whites within the U.S. racial

hierarchy. Moreover, the model minority myth rhetorically motivates other people of color

such as African Americans, Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans to be like Asians,

persuading them to be hardworking and politically nonconfrontational. But simultaneously,

the model minority does not work only to oppress Asian bodies in the U.S. Because of this

stereotype, Asian/Americans are often assumed to be *the model* for other minority groups and

communities. Specifically, the successful, economically stable, and hardworking images are

already associated with Asian bodies within the U.S. sociohistorical structures. This means,

the ideology of Asian/Americans as the model minority influences how Asians are holding

privileged positionality (e.g., socially accepted and politically non-threatening groups of

people) and contributing to the maintenance of white supremacy.

In addition to the model minority myth, the concept of yellow peril reveals the

paradoxical positionality of Asian/Americans in the U.S. racial formation. Ono and Pham

(2009) described the tension between the model minority myth and yellow peril, as follows:

one side of the coin is the model minority stereotype that sees Asians and Asian

Americans as hardworking, dedicated, educationally successful, and the like. On the

other side of the coin, Asian Americans are competitive, threatening to take over, and

therefore pose a threat to the West as yellow peril. (p. 175)

Early Chinese and Japanese migrant workers were welcomed as cheap (but hardworking)

laborers under the capitalist system which supported building the nation-state and the

economic growth of the U.S. since the late 19th century. Simultaneously, with the dominant

culture of the white race and Western civilization, the dominant Whites feared Asians who

come from the *Orient* taking over the U.S. economy and white supremacy (Kawai, 2005).

Consequently, this sociohistorical positionality of Asian bodies continues to racialize

Asian/Americans as *honorary whites* and *forever foreigners* (Tuan, 1998) in the U.S. racial

formation.

Most of the Japanese immigrants, *Issei* (一世 [literally, first generation]) worked as

farmers and agricultural laborers in the West Coast area like California. Through the early

history of immigration laws and policies such as the Immigration Act in 1875, the Page Law,

and the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, Japanese ethnicity was differentiated from the

Chinese immigrants for a short period of time. For example, Chinese women were banned

from entering the U.S. while Japanese women were allowed to enter the U.S. with their

husbands. This was because the benefits of farming are sustained or strengthened by the

family labors as opposed to the industrial construction work such as building railroads and

mining. Both Japanese men and women's migration helped them to settle in and build

Japanese/American communities in the U.S. But eventually, Japanese migration was

restricted like the Chinese as the numbers of Japanese migrants had drastically increased

after 1900. Consequently, the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1908 was legislated to regulate

further immigration of the Japanese in response to Japan's victory over the Russo-Japanese

war and anti-Japanese sentiment in the U.S. Moreover, Japanese migrants were oppressed by

the Alien Land Law adopted in California which limited their property ownership rights.

The anti-Japanese sentiment was heightened in the U.S. especially during WWII,

after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. For example, approximately 110,000 Japanese migrants

and Japanese Americans, including men, women, and children to elders were incarcerated at

concentration camps regardless of their citizenship status and political alignment with the

U.S. or Japan under Executive Order 9066 in 1942 (Hirasuna, 2013). The lives of

Japanese/Americans were shattered and imprisoned in remotely located areas surrounded by

barbed wires, monitored, controlled, and encroached by armed soldiers. Their human rights,

properties, and agencies were taken away as the enemy aliens. As the legislature of Executive

Order 9066 includes Japanese Americans to mandate their incarceration, not only did apply

to *Issei* but also forced *Nisei* (二世 [literally, second generation]) who were born in the U.S.

as U.S. citizens to be interned.

Even though *Nisei* are documented U.S. citizens, they have continuously been

discriminated against (Koikari, 2010). Azuma (2009) illustrated the wartime Japan-U.S.

relation and complex positionalities of *Nisei*, Japanese Americans in transnational localities.

Through the analysis of *Nisei* soldiers' experiences in Japan during the U.S.-led Allied

military occupation in the 1940s and 1950s, Azuma (2009) elucidated the dilemma and

paradoxical positionalities of *Nisei*. During the military occupation, *Nisei* were the bridge

who maintain Japan-U.S. allyship by being the cultural and linguistic translator between

Japan and the U.S.; but simultaneously, they were considered as a perpetual threat or enemy alien against the U.S.

Here, the positionality of *Nisei* embodies the historical legacy of the U.S. racialization, the aforementioned simultaneous framing of Asian/Americans as *forever foreigners* and *honorary whites* (Tuan, 1998). Dis/oriented by the colonial logic, Japanese/Americans are positioned as "almost the same [but] not quite/not white" (Kim, 2010, p. 99). Azuma (2009) described the nuanced positionality of *Nisei,* as follows:

> As victims of racism in the United States, many *Nisei* were compelled to treat non-citizen Japanese roughly to compensate for it. The possession of U.S. citizenship signified uncontested power and privilege in a geopolitical context of Pax-Americana, but *Nisei*'s embrace of it came with a price — the paradox of making them oppressed and oppressor at the same time. (p. 210; emphasis in original)

On the one hand, Japanese Americans' accessibility to facilities, resources, and information was limited and their behaviors were monitored, controlled, and supervised by Whites even though Japanese Americans are U.S. citizens. More specifically, *Nisei* often did not have the access to the military documents without the supervision of white Americans because of the wartime anti-Japanese sentiment (e.g., Japanese American incarnation and internment) and they were consistently being suspected as spies of Japan. On the other hand, they were strategically positioned as people who are nearly white, and the citizenship status worked as the symbol of superiority over non-citizen Japanese (Azuma, 2009; Koikari, 2010).

Subsequently, Japan's *baburu keiki* (バブル景気 [literally, bubble economy]), a rapid economic and political growth and global competency in the 1980s sustained and strengthened the anti-Japanese sentiment in the U.S. (Graburn & Ertl, 2008; Toyoaki &

Eguchi, 2017). For instance, the rise of the Japanese automobile industry had pressured U.S. domestic automobile sales. This pressure became an economic threat to the superiority and stability of the U.S. automobile industry. Considering the Japanese automobile industry's success in the U.S. as an economic invasion, the anti-Japanese sentiment was inflamed around the Detroit area which is well known as the birthplace of the U.S. automobile industry. As a material consequence of the anti-Japanese sentiment with regard to the automobile industry, Vincent Chin, a Chinese American man, was killed by two White men who were automobile workers in Detroit because Chin was mistakenly seen and identified as a Japanese man (Ahmed, 2021). Therefore, Japanese migrants in the U.S. have historically been struggling to survive through institutionalized systems of oppression such as immigration laws, policies, and anti-Japanese sentiment before/during/after WWII.

Further revisiting the historical context beyond Japanese/American race, racialization, and racism, I emphasize the intersectional viewpoints of how gender and sexuality are raced and racialized in the U.S. For instance, Andrew Kung, a New York-based Chinese American male photographer challenges the hegemonic masculinity that toxically marginalizes Asian American men. Through the photo projects, Kung (2020) questioned and reconfigured the meaning and being of racialized Asian American masculinity that need to be examined with discourses of ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, as follows:

> Because we have been historically desexualized, there is often an underlying pressure
> to portray traditional visual cues of masculinity: chiseled jaw lines, elevated cheek
> bones, sculpted bodies. Instead, I wanted to celebrate a level of intimacy -- with self,
> with other men -- across a spectrum of genders, sexualities, appearances and

ethnicities that people might not associate with what it means to be masculine. (para. 14)

As Kung (2020) underscored the historical legacy of desexualization against Asian male bodies in the U.S., intersecting identities of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and the body must be examined as inseparable vectors in order to better understand the sociohistorical context of Asian/American identities and cultures in the U.S.

Moreover, as previously mentioned, just like Vincent Chin was mistakenly identified as a Japanese man, the U.S. racialization conceals Asian ethnicities through a monolithic racial category of *Asian* and systematically positions Asian bodies in jeopardy. Under the rhetoric and discursive practices of U.S. racialization, differences of Asian ethnicities do not matter or remain silent. Therefore, illuminating discourses of Asian/American gender and sexuality allows me to address theoretical knowledge about Asian/Americans at the macro-level and connect ideologies and concepts with ethnically specific experiences of Japanese/Americans (who are racially categorized as *Asian/Americans*) at the micro-level. In the next section, I highlight the broader conversations about discourses of Asian/American gender and sexuality and how Asian/American men and women have been gendered and sexualized in the U.S. racial formation.

### Asian/American Gender & Sexuality

As one of the foundational literatures of Asian/American Studies, Lisa Lowe's work of *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* considered contemporary Asian American identity as a site of struggle in the U.S. that their memberships to the country have always been contested (e.g., simultaneously positioned as citizen and alien). In complicating the discourse of Asian American identities and cultures, Lowe (1996) theorized Asian

American critique within the context of U.S. immigration history, policies, and laws. Here, the term *Asian American* without slash is used to reflect on Lowe's original text and scholarship; however, my understanding of racialization is concurring with Palumbo-Liu's (1999) notion of *indecidability* pertaining to Asian/American identities. Lowe defined Asian American critique as a politicization process of Asian American positionality and its sociohistorical context in the U.S.

Specifically, Lowe emphasized that the post-1965 Asian immigrant community is a critical site of inquiry to dismantle disciplinary paradigms of U.S.-centered Asian/American Studies. In this vein, the marginalized position of Asian/Americans offers the possibility to disrupt and shift the universalized racial discourses of the U.S. by centering different historical contexts and narratives of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans. Asian American critique is the engagement to a set of contradictions as the starting point of critique, dialectically situates Asian American identities and cultures as an alternative site for challenging the U.S. American nation-state and dominant structures of power. Lowe noted that Asian American critique does not intend to resolve or reconcile the contradictions. Rather, it is a way to study, identify, and make sense of contradicting phenomena.

Lowe's literature centers around the discourse of political acts and elucidates historically, culturally, socially, and politically constructed notions of Asia, Asian, and Asian/American and how Asian/Americans have been positioned as *other*, *foreign*, and *alien* within the realm of U.S. national identity. But simultaneously, Asian/American labor under the capitalist system supported the economic growth of the U.S. which ultimately became a part of American identity. Thus, Lowe grounded Asian American critique by investigating the racial/ethnic, historical, and political tensions between Asian immigrants, Asian

Americans, and Americans through the lens of national culture, identity, and transnationalism. Therefore, Lowe's point of situating Asian immigration and immigrants as a historically, culturally, and politically distinctive site of study is an epistemological contribution to further investigate U.S. racial formation outside the terrain of national culture.

Situating the body as primal knowledge production, scholars (e.g., Chen, 1996; Han, 2015; Hiramoto & Pua, 2019; Shimizu, 2007/2012) argued that Asian/Americans have been racialized, gendered, and sexualized in multiple ways within the U.S. racial formation and social orders. Masequesmay and Metzger (2010) asserted that "we must understand the social and historical contexts behind particular and persistent conjunctions of sexuality and race" (p. 3). Bridging the discourses of race, gender, and sexuality, they underlined historical trajectories of Asian/Americans and specifically explored sexual politics in Asian/American Studies. For example, they articulated how the early history of Chinese and Japanese immigration created anti-Asian sentiment since the 1870s which led to the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 and the Gentleman's Agreement in 1907 to severely restrict Asian immigrants in the U.S. Accordingly, WWII became a crucial dividing line in Asian/American history which rapidly shifted the U.S. demographics, especially during and after the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s (i.e., the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Act, Barred Zone Act, and the immigration and naturalization laws, and more).

These historical trajectories of laws, policies, and citizenship have closely impacted Asian/American gender and sexuality discourses. As Shimizu (2007/2012) emphasized, it is imperative to revisit and engage with the sociohistorical context of identity formation such as immigration history, law and citizenship, and media influences in exploring Asian/American racialization of masculinity and femininity. For example, an early immigration policy only

allowed Asian male migrant workers to enter the U.S. which eventually created Asian

bachelor communities. In response to the increased population of Asian immigrants around

the 1840s, Congress passed the exclusionary legislation to protect the white labor's rights.

Simultaneously, interracial marriage between White women and Asian men was prohibited

under the law. If the policies were violated, Asian men are punished or imprisoned by the

legal penalty. Chen (1996) argued that this series of policies and laws "deprived heterosexual

Asian American males of sexual expression and potential fatherhood" (p. 59). Because of

these exclusionary laws and policies in protecting the rights for Whites, the majority of

available jobs for Asian male migrant workers were generally considered as women's labor

such as cooks, janitors, waiters, and housekeepers. In this vein, a series of restrictive policies

and laws desexualized Asian men as people who are incapable of fulfilling the heterosexual

expectation of marriage, and their work environment feminized them as men who cannot be

masculine enough within the cisheteronormative structures (Chen, 1996; Lowe, 1996).

Simultaneously, Chou (2012) further argued that the issue of feminized labor does not

fully articulate the gender ideology of Asian American men because other men of color such

as Blacks, Latinos, indigenous, and more also shared the gendered labor. To further explain

the gender and sexuality systems pertaining to Asian/American identities, scholars

highlighted that the mainstream media has a significant impact on constructing

hypersexualized and hyposexualized representations of Asian men and women in the U.S.

(e.g., Chen, 1996; Chou, 2012; Espiritu, 1992; Masequesmay & Metzger, 2010; Takagi,

1996) Shimizu (2007) demonstrated how media representations and performances of

Asian/American women and their bodies have been hypersexualized and consumed as exotic,

erotic, and submissive Others in Hollywood films. These hypersexualized and fetishized

representations limit the understanding of Asian/American women's race and gender. Specifically, Asian women are often portrayed as desirable romantic/sexual partners for white men (e.g., Han, 2015; Pyke & Johnson, 2003; Shimizu, 2007). Elaborating on Asian/American women's hypersexualized media representations, Shimizu (2012) further intervened in the troubled positionality of Asian/American men and manhood in films. Shimizu noted that Asian/American men are often portrayed as feminine, anti-sexual, and gay which frames them as undesirable Others in heterosexual relationships (see also, Eng, 2001; Han, 2015; Washington, 2016). Supporting Shimizu's arguments of hypersexualization and hyposexualization of Asian/American men and women on media, Pyke and Johnson (2003) examined racialized gender expectations in real-life situations through individual and group interviews with Korean American and Vietnamese American women. They also found that "Asian women are rendered hyperfeminine: passive, weak, quiet, excessively submissive, slavishly dutiful, sexually exotic, and available for white men" (p. 36) in the U.S. Thus, Asian/American bodies are always subordinated by the hegemonic institutions of masculinity and femininity in everyday representations and practices.

In examining the racialization of Asian/American men within the heteronormative gender and sexual hierarchy, Shimizu (2012) considered screen performances (i.e., Hollywood, independent, and pornographic films) as the site for illuminating "ethical manhood that recognizes its power not only to hurt others, *but to remap what is valued in our society*" (p. 8, emphasis in original). By ethical manhood, Shimizu drew on the conceptualization of ethical relations which demonstrates both strength and vulnerability as an important expression of responsibility. In particular, Shimizu (2012) reminded the nuanced gendered and sexualized positionality of Asian/American men, as follows:

The attribution of asexual, effeminate, and queer as lacking that characterizes

discourses of Asian American masculinity inadequately captures how Asian

American men wield power as well as experience its disciplining force. Oft-repeated,

the assessment of lack secures gayness, asexuality, or feminine masculinity as wrong

and undesirable. (p. 8)

Shimizu (2012) called this set of normalized attribution (i.e., sexless, feminine, emasculated,

and passive) as *straightjacket sexuality* and argued that it is insufficient for interrogating the

issues of Asian/American men and masculinity. It is important to note that Asian/American

men are not simply the victims of U.S. structures of power. As cisgender heterosexual men,

they may impose and internalize the logic of cisheteronormative assumptions in their

everyday experiences of masculinity which also maintain and perpetuate the dominant social

structures. Hence, rather than simply articulating the victimization and lack(ing) of

Asian/American men in discourses of racialized gender and sexuality, Shimizu emphasized

the significance of elucidating the political possibilities informed by the concept of ethical

manhood and racialized notions of masculinity and heterosexuality. This claim supports one

of the goals of this study, to look into the contradictions and relationalities of racialized lived

experiences and positionalities within the spectrum of privilege and marginalization.

España-Maram (2006) examined Asian/American masculinity through the often-

unheard lived experiences of Filipino immigrant workers and community from the 1920s

until after the end of WWII. In showcasing the culturally and ethnically specific Filipino

identity and masculinity, España-Maram (2006) argued, as follows:

For Filipinos, excluded from the established social, economic, and political structures

that in any event privileged whiteness as a component of the dominant's society's

construction of manhood and, by extension, power, wage work and cultural practices

provided viable avenues through which they measured and asserted masculinity. (p.

7)

Unlike the popular academic conversations about Filipino identity which heavily focus on discourses of immigration, labor, and class, España-Maram took a provocative turn to illustrate *how* Filipino migrant workers narrate their (re)negotiation of race, ethnicity, nationalism, gender, and sexuality through Filipino men's participation to leisure activities such as gambling, boxing, and tax hall dancing.

The immigrant history of Filipinos and Asians is a foundational source for exploring the issues of Asian/American race, racialization, and racism in the U.S. But simultaneously, España-Maram located cultural practices of leisure activities in relation to the sociohistorical context of labor as an alternative space of inquiry, complicating the history of Filipino immigrant laborers and how laborers lived, or more specifically survived, with whiteness and hegemonic masculinity in the hostile labor environment. For example, España-Maram (2006) explained how boxing became a crucial site "where Filipinos were regarded by men from the dominant society as virile men" (p. 94). As marginalized people of color, Filipino boxers proved their strengths on the ring as formidable opponents against men from the dominant society, became the underdog heroes in the Filipino community. Simultaneously, the heroic narrative of Filipino boxers became a collective identity for Filipino men (i.e., laborers) by participating in the stories. In this way, the cultural practice of boxing became a form of male solidarity and a tool against the white male virility and superiority. Thus, for Filipinos, masculinity refers to as "part of a continuing performance, whose principles are played out through shared rituals of physical confrontations in and out of the ring" (España-Maram,

32

2006, p. 94). España-Maram's approach to Filipino men and masculinity is epistemologically and methodologically remarkable for interdisciplinary fields because the historically, culturally, and politically specific knowledge come from *their* (Filipino men's) views of identities, cultures, and society.

Moreover, in further reviewing discourses on Asian/American gender and sexuality, I am attentive to gay Asian men's racialized experiences which also mirror that of heterosexual Asian men. Drawing on queer scholarship, Han (2015) conducted close analyses of media representations and personal narratives of gay and Asian men in the U.S. Han's queer approach to interrogate lived experiences of gay and Asian men is particularly significant for complicating academic conversations about Asian/American identity politics because discourses of gender and sexuality have not been thoroughly examined as the center focus in Asian/American research (see also, Chou, 2012). Importantly, I concur with Han's (2015) critiques of the racialization and (de)sexualization of gay Asian men because there are contextual parallels as to how heterosexual Asian men experience their identities in the everyday.

In exploring Asian/American sexual politics, Han (2015) also attentively highlighted the racialized discourse of Asian men, women, masculinity, and femininity, as follows:

> Where Asian men have been denied masculinity, Asian women have been hyperfeminized. Whereas Asian men have been marked as sexually undesirable because of their race, Asian women have been marked as sexual prizes for white male consumption and, because of their alleged hyperfemininity, more sexually desirable than white women. (p. 6)

Still, as Masequesmay and Metzger (2009) stated that Asian/American literature "has been heavily heterosexual or anonymously homosexual," (p. 11) Han (2015) also remained that existing Asian/American scholarship is largely heteronormative which limits nuanced and broader understandings of what it means to be a part of the Asian/American community. Therefore, in engaging with heterosexuality and (hetero)sexual politics, I must attend to the critique of heteronormative and heterosexist legacy in Asian/American literature by carefully reflecting on the privilege of the normative discourse of gender and sexuality (e.g., Chou, 2012/2015; Han, 2015; Masequesmay & Metzger, 2009; Wong et al., 1999). Simultaneously, I must reiterate that not all Asian men are racialized, gendered, and sexualized in the same way. Many scholarship on Asian/American men reveal the historical continuum of oppression in relation to gender and sexuality systems. However, I argue that Asian/American men are also holding privileged positionalities. For example, being a cisgender male receives benefits within the U.S. patriarchal system.

Chou et al. (2012/2015) highlighted that the majority of Asian/American scholarship has been focused on race-based research to interrogate Asian/American identities and cultures. Moreover, from sociological perspectives, they emphasized that a large part of Sociology literature is inherently grounded in social scientific approaches and the qualitative analysis of Asian/American texts is still lacking in its in-depth examinations. Elaborating on these critiques, they called for an intersectional approach to the studies of Asian/American masculinity to interrogate the complex intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality within the discourse of Asian/American identities and cultures (see also, Nemoto, 2008). Moreover, Chou (2012) asserted that the lack of studies about Asian/Americans in general, but specifically heterosexual men. She emphasized that "the little research that exists is

largely focused on women and gay Asian American men" (p. 103). While there is a few emerging scholarship about women and gay Asian American men, Chou highlighted the lack of heterosexual politics of Asian American men in interdisciplinary fields. In fact, some books exploring Asian/American women and hypersexualization and gay Asian/American men and hyposexualization have been published (e.g., Eng, 2001; Shimizu, 2012). However, there is no full-length book on examining Asian/American masculinity and heterosexuality published yet in Communication.

### *Online Space & Dating*

The early belief of online space offered views in which people can escape from social interactions of race, gender, and class (Punday, 2000). This belief was particularly induced by the utopianism of the internet and cyberspace as democratic, new, and progressive sites where they are free from racial, gender, sexual, and class discrimination (Nakamura, 2002). However, contemporary critical scholars in Media Studies have been challenging this idealistic and utopian belief by asserting how the online space can maintain and reproduce interlocking systems of social identities and conditions such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and more. To name a few examples, Nakamura (2002) claimed that "Internet is a theater of sorts, a theater of performed identities" (p. 31) where race is constituted as one of the core vectors in impacting everyday communications in the online space. Specifically, Nakamura (2002) problematized the celebration of the Internet as a *raceless* space. She looked into a variety of online interfaces such as websites, games, advertisements, and films to unpack the complex digital boundaries between what is virtual and real. On the note of the relationality between race and cyberspace, she emphasized as follows:

Even as the Internet makes it increasingly difficult to police the line between the

virtual and the "real," it is vitally important for cyberculture studies to "keep it real"

— to remember that while race may be, in some sense, "virtual" or at the very least

culturally and discursively constructed as opposed to biologically grounded, racism

both on- and offline *are* real. (Nakamura, 2002, p. 145; emphasis in original)

Her assertion of the study of race and online space to *keep it real* is no exception to other

social identities such as gender, sexuality, and class because these institutions are socially

constructed and enacted as our reality of everyday interactions both physically and virtually.

Further, scholars such as Atay (2021), Gajjala (2002), and Mitra (2008) pushed their

studies focusing on diasporic, transnational, and queer bodies in cyberspace (e.g., social

media, online gaming/streaming, Internet, and other media platforms) in addition to their

primary concerns of race, ethnicity, and nationality. Acknowledging that cyberspace as

culture consists of multiple mediated and digitized stories such as personal, communal,

computer, Internet, and more, Atay (2021) argued that "as individuals we to come to these

spaces or cyber or mediated culture that surrounds us to communicate, to live, and to present

and perform different aspects of our identities" (p. 184). In envisioning the possibilities of

Media Studies, particularly dealing with new media, Atay (2021) emphasized the

significance of transnational and decolonial work in studies of cyberspace, highlighting lived

experiences of historically marginalized bodies to challenge the U.S./Western-centric

perspectives. Hence, moving away from the early belief of online space as the utopia and

liberation from a series of inequality, recent critical cultural scholars elucidate the importance

of hearing voices, stories, and feelings of people engaging and living with cyberspace where

the dominant structures of power such as colonialism, imperialism, and whiteness affecting the everyday context.

Since the emergence of online dating sites in the 1990s, the dynamics of interpersonal communication, dating, and relationships have commensurately changed their forms with the advent of technology and digital media in our contemporary society. For example, the use of an online dating space replaces traditional social roles of friends and family in matchmaking with computer-mediated algorithms and social networking. Rosenfeld et al. (2019) recognized that the traditional system of dating is mediated by friends and family, and this system of matchmaking has been considered as favorable and socially acceptable. The traditional social roles of friends and family have been crucial because their intermediation provides the guarantee that "any potential partner had been personally vetted and vouched for by trusted alters" (Rosenfeld et al., 2019, p. 17753). Thus, friends and family have been the essential medium in traditional dating scenes.

However, the emergence of the online dating platform made people possible to meet their romantic partners without the intermediation of their friends and family. Because friends and family are less involved in the process of meeting romantic partners, the culture of matchmaking has shifted towards a more individualistic model in the online dating space. For example, people can select a specific app based on the individual purpose of matchmaking. Some people may find a romantic partner with a short/long-term relationship, while others may be looking for a casual sexual relationship. Some people may prefer dating with certain groups of people (e.g., racial identities, gender/sexual orientations, age groups, religious beliefs, and more). Moreover, dating or relationship partners are predicted through proprietary algorithms and social networking on computers or mobile phones, and the

process of seeking relationships can be filtered by individual choices. Through the technological evolution and transformation, online dating has become a space where it maneuvers traditional and/or normative assumptions of matchmaking processes, shifting the ways how people experience dating, relationships, and interpersonal communication.

The topic of online dating has been studied in many ways with a variety of disciplinary, theoretical, and methodological approaches. To name a few examples, Tong et al. (2016) examined how the online dating system and design affect the users' decision-making in romantic relationship building. Specifically, they focused on three different formats of the online dating system such as see-and-screen, algorithm, and blended to interrogate the ways in which computational systems interfere users' behaviors, expectations, and agencies. They found in their study that the algorithmic system and its recommendations can provide an external validation for the users which is similar to the approval by one's family and friends. Moreover, the blended system (e.g., the mix of see-and-screen and algorithm) may increase the satisfaction and individual control/agency for the users' choice of potential romantic partners. Toma and Hancock (2010) studied the role of users' physical attractiveness in online dating. They specifically examined users' self-presentation and strategic use of deception in creating their profiles in heterosexual online dating. The study suggested the significance of self-presentation in online dating that many users strategize their selections of profile pictures, short bios, and descriptions to enhance physical appearances and social status to be more attractive or desirable.

Illustrated by studies of Tong et al. (2016) and Toma and Hancock (2010), self-presentation is one of the common areas of study in online dating. Other scholars examine how race (Curington et al., 2015; Feliciano et al., 2011), gender (Kreager et al., 2014;

Tsunokai et al., 2014), and sexuality (Harren et al., 2021) impact the outcome of online

dating experiences. Health-related issues such as health risks in general, HIV/AIDS, and

sexual violence are also commonly studied topics in online dating (Couch & Liamputtong,

2012; Robinson, 2017). These scholarship are grounded in interdisciplinary fields such as

Media Studies, Psychology, Sociology, Computer Sciences, Health Sciences, and more. As

technology, culture, and identity are consistently shifting the dynamics of interpersonal and

intercultural relationships, scholars engage with the topic of online dating through a variety

of perspectives.

Bauman (2013) identified the shifting dynamics of romantic relationships as *liquid*

*love*, meaning that the solidity and security of kinship and family structures have liquefied

with the evolution of modern computer-mediated dating space. Drawing on Bauman's (2013)

idea of symptomatic relation between computer-mediated dating and *liquid love*, Hobbs et al.

(2017) argued that "Dating is being transformed into a recreational activity, where people are

seen as largely disposable as one can always 'press delete'" (p. 274). As of 2020, more than

270 million people are active users of online dating apps worldwide (Curry, 2021).

Specifically, the U.S. marks the top revenue for the online dating market in the world and the

study shows that approximately 30% of U.S. adults have used a dating site or app (Anderson

et al., 2020). Despite the increasing popularity and significant shifts in interpersonal

relationships, Hobbs et al. (2017) noted that critical interventions of online dating apps as a

distinctive social phenomenon are still lacking in academic discourses. For example, there

are studies on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter exploring human

communication (e.g., Cisneros & Nakayama, 2015; Lane et al., 2016; Pennington & Hall,

2020), though similar studies centered on dating apps are significantly less common, and

often focus on the risks and health impacts of the usage (e.g., Buchanan & Whitty, 2014; Couch et al., 2012). To date, there are few studies in Critical Intercultural Communication about the narratives and lived experiences in online dating as a social phenomenon, qualitatively analyzing voices from everyday interactions to critique social structures and institutions of power.

In particular, some studies demonstrated the space and interactions in online dating are often racialized, gendered, and sexualized. For example, Tsunokai et al. (2013) examined heterosexual relationships in online dating and argued that "heterosexuals tend to highlight norms and behaviors that are reflective of a racial hierarchy, where Whites are often viewed as being the most desirable, and where people of color … are consistently seen as being less suitable dating partners" (p. 799). As this finding of (un)desirability of people of color and racial hierarchy indicates, the dominant positionality of White men in online dating is often articulated and analyzed in critical scholarship. Simultaneously, as Tsunokai et al. (2013) underscored the maintenance and reinforcement of norms in online dating by heterosexual people, it is important to note that the online dating space exists within the dominant structures of patriarchy and cisheteronormativity in the U.S. (see also, Chan, 2021) Here, I acknowledge that while findings presented by Tsunokai et al. (2013) illustrate the sociohistorical construction of racialized gender and sexuality discourses, privileged positionalities of heterosexual men of color must be articulated to showcase that not all non-White men are just the victim of historical marginalization. In this vein, although the online dating space can be a possibility to invite diverse forms or dynamics of interpersonal relationships and communication, social systems of patriarchy and cisheteronormativity must be challenged.

By heteronormativity, I mean the sociohistorical processes and structures that situate heterosexuality as "*the* standard for legitimate, authentic, prescriptive, and ruling social, cultural, and sexual arrangements" (Yep, 2003, p. 13; emphasis in original) in society. For example, concepts such as marriage and reproduction are historically normalized heterosexual acts/behaviors. By idealizing and universalizing heterosexuality as the norm, heteronormativity reinserts the idea of sex, gender, and sexuality as binary and/or fixed and rejects its fluidity and spectrum (e.g., Eguchi, 2015; Eguchi & Asante, 2016; LeMaster, 2015; Yep, 2003/2017). Simultaneously, I acknowledge that heteronormative concepts such as marriage, reproduction, family, domesticity, kinship, patriarchy, and more have gradually been moving away from being exclusively heterosexual. For example, the idea of marriage is historically rooted in patriarchy and cisheteronormativity. However, it has increasingly been seen in non-heterosexual relationships. Reproduction is also an act that is culturally changing its process and meaning. With the development of fertility clinics and sperm banks, reproduction can be a possibility for many people with uteruses, not just an exclusive act/behavior for heterosexual pairs. Moreover, the increasing legalizations of same-sex marriage and legislature of adoption have shifted the meaning of family and kinship which non-heterosexual couples can form the unit of family and the blood-line connection is no longer the required vector for defining kinship.

However, cisheteronormativity as a dominant ideology continues to construct *the* ideal, universal, and normative sexual framework that marginalizes non-cisheterosexual being and doing (Yep, 2003/2017). For example, many non-heterosexual people do not have enough federal protections against sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination in areas of employment, education, public accommodations, housing, and credit across the U.S.

41

(Conron & Goldberg, 2020). On April 29, 2021, the president of the U.S., Joe Biden made a statement about protecting the rights of LGBTQ people (Fernando, 2021). This presidential statement is a simultaneous indication of the growing awareness of LGBTQ rights and lack of equality for non-heterosexual people in today's U.S. laws and policies. Because of the historically engrained heteronormativity, non-heterosexual people are suffering from everyday discrimination.

Importantly, the online dating space itself is not a singular, monolithic, and homogenous location for seeking interpersonal relationships. Rather, it is a culturally and politically situated space. Specifically, the online dating space is often targeted toward specific demographics (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and age) and purposes (e.g., casual hookups, short/long-term relationships, social, romantic, and sexual) based on the marketing strategies. With the ever-changing dynamics of online dating contexts, Chan (2021) alerted that "scholars must not assume that a unitary purpose exists among [online dating] app users" (p. 123). For example, Tinder is commonly known as a hookup dating app and I cannot ignore this sexual implication attached to the app (Claxton & van Dulmen, 2013). However, it is also problematic to generalize Tinder as a dating app with the primary purpose of hookups (LeFebvre, 2018). Nowadays, individuals' purposes and motives to participate in online dating have diversified as numerous online dating sites offer a wide range of options for seeking relationships. For Bumble, the app was initially created only for dating purposes. But later, Bumble launched Bumble BFF which intends to find platonic friendships, and Bumble Bizz which intends to find business partners and mentors (Lee, 2017). Therefore, although there may be certain sexual implications tied to specific online dating apps, users' purposes for participating in the online dating space vary depending on

individual cultural, political, and social contexts. Online dating interactions have been customized to individual needs, choices of dating apps, and sexual preferences.

Despite the marketing effort of inviting diversity and creating an inclusive space for users, the online dating space is often a site of exclusion for certain individuals or groups of people. Holt (2021) maintained that racism is an ongoing issue in online dating that benefits White people. As a Black woman, she reflected on her online dating experience, as follows:

> Eventually, I stopped swiping on non-Black men altogether. There had been several cases before when a white man would match with me and then DM me something obscure like my skin tone reminding him of chocolate or feeling the need to tell me he's always wanted to fuck a Black girl. (para. 2)

Holt (2021) also extended how Black men, Asian men and women, and Latino/a commonly experience racial discrimination in the online dating space. As her story reveals, the online dating space continues to reject or exclude people on the margin and a further scholarly intervention to this space is much needed. However, negotiations of historically marginalized identities such as women, LGBTQ, Black, indigenous, and people of color and how they resist and challenge the dominant positionality of whiteness, white supremacy, and racial hierarchy in the online dating space have not been thoroughly discussed in the academic disciplines. Tuning to the subject group of this study, Japanese people are racialized as Asian and positioned as people of color who have historically been marginalized in the U.S. sociohistorical context. But at the same time, they are not simply a marginalized group. Especially, I examine the experiences of U.S.-based cisgender Japanese men who self-identify as heterosexual. Their social identities already insinuate multiple layers of privileges within the U.S. sociohistorical structures of power such as patriarchy and

cisheteronormativity. Therefore, in conducting this study, it is important for me to account for contradictions and relationalities of Japanese men's experiences within the spectrum of privilege and marginalization in online dating.

While there are a few studies about Asian/Americans in the online dating space (e.g., Kao et al., 2018; Tsunokai et al., 2014), not much studies focus on ethnically specific experiences of U.S.-based Japanese people in online dating. Therefore, working with the historical feminization of Asian/American men and masculinity, the study of Japanese men and masculinity in the U.S. online dating contributes to support the scholarship on Asian/Americans as people of color navigating their identities in the online dating space. Simultaneously, I complicate the understanding of dominant ideas of masculinity and heterosexuality to interrogate the contradictions and relationalities pertaining to the lived experiences of U.S.-based Japanese men. In this way, I also extend the academic conversations about nuanced and complex identity politics in online dating. By examining lived experiences of Japanese men, this study further contextualizes the politics of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality in the online dating space in Critical Intercultural Communication scholarship. In what follows, I introduce theoretical frameworks that guide my analysis of narratives in this study.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

In examining lived experiences of U.S.-based Japanese men, my theoretical framework is grounded within the studies of whiteness (e.g., Calafell et al., 2020; McIntosh et al., 2019; Nakayama & Martin, 1999; Toyosaki, 2016) and racialized gender, (hetero)sexuality, and relationalities (e.g., Chou, 2012; Eguchi, 2020; Eng, 2001; Han, 2015; Sekimoto, 2014; Shimizu, 2007/2012; Yep et al., 2020). In this study, I examine the lived

experiences of U.S.-based Japanese men within the hegemonic structures of whiteness and racialization in online dating. By interrogating online dating experiences of Japanese men, masculinity, and heterosexuality, this study illuminates the historical legacy of the U.S. racial formation and how whiteness permeates online space, relationships, and contexts.

*Social Institutions of Whiteness*

**Whiteness Studies & (Asian/American) Communication.** Ono and Nakayama (2004) addressed the emergence of Asian American Communication by critiquing communication studies' fundamental focus on social scientific approaches to identity politics. They emphasized that Asian American Communication is "driven by a desire to address social concerns facing Asian Americans through the lens (and field) of communication studies" (Ono & Nakayama, 2004, p. 88). According to their standpoint, a social scientific approach in Asian American Communication lacks Asian/American historical context and intercultural connection to different racial and ethnic subgroups such as African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and more. Moreover, they pointed out that studies about Asian/American identities and cultures lack its attention to Asian histories. For example, Japanese ethnicity carries culturally specific histories in international localities. Through the history of colonization of Asian loci such as Korea, Taiwan, Manchuria, Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and more, Japan became the hegemony of Asia in the process of internationalization/Westernization (Sekimoto, 2014). This history of the Empire of Japan insinuates class status, international competency and positionality, and the matrix of power in the global context. Nonetheless, Japanese migrant bodies carry the histories of imperialism and colonialism in the U.S. Therefore, through the lens of whiteness, critically reflecting on the historical context of Japan as a nation-state and Japanese

im/migration is particularly important in analyzing lived experiences of Japanese men in the U.S.

In the history of the U.S., the racialization of Asian/American identity has always been a contested site of inquiry as a minority group who are marginalized, oppressed, and silenced within the dominant systems of society. Historically, White people have been the dominant group as a consequence of U.S. colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. Belongs to the dominant group of society, Whites have been claimed and positioned as the top of the racial hierarchy, marginalizing non-Whites and/or minority groups of people to maintain and reinforce white superiority and privilege in the U.S. social order (Martin & Nakayama, 2018; Nakayama & Martin, 1999). Said differently, Asian/Americans have been subjugated to sustain and reproduce the dominant power of Whites. This sociohistorical power relation is described as whiteness which refers to a communication phenomenon that indicates "particular experiences that were assumed to be universal (being white, heterosexual, Christian, middle class, English speaking, able bodied) and objective norms" (Nakayama & Martin, 1999, p. 4). It is a strategically structured system to maintain the power of Whites by centering the dominant white experiences as normative.

Whiteness has been an emergent interdisciplinary arena of inquiry to further interrogate discourses of identities and cultures in the U.S. (see, Calafell et al., 2020; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Nakayama & Martin, 1999; Toyosaki, 2016). According to the U.S. Bureau of Census, in 1810, 81% of the population is white; in 2010, the data reports 74.8% of the population is white (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2002/2010). While the White population marks the lowest percentage in 2010 since the 1800s, Whites have historically been and will likely to continuously be the dominant (majority) racial group of the U.S. As

46

Cooks (2003) critiqued that whiteness is a "set of rhetorical strategies employed to construct and maintain a dominant White culture and identities," (p. 246) racial superiority and privilege of Whites as the normative ideology has long existed through the practice of whiteness in the U.S. history.

This existence of whiteness is no exception in academia. By reflecting on the historical context of Intercultural Communication, Moon (2010) asserted that Intercultural Communication research "remains ensconced in colonial perspectives that de-humanize 'others' and which implicitly (and perhaps explicitly) support and reproduce US imperialism" (p. 42). It has always been the studies of *others* through the dominant white perspectives. For example, as Ono and Nakayama (2004) noted on Asian American Communication, in-depth voices and histories of Asian/Americans have long been silenced, ignored, and hidden by the master narratives created by the dominant White to maintain and reinforce their power in the U.S. Thus, genealogical contexts of whiteness in Communication research inform how academia has been a space of reproducing colonialism and imperialism.

Critical scholars have examined messy human interactions and intersections of identities by critiquing social institutions of whiteness. By social institutions of whiteness, I draw on Griffin's (2015) definition of whiteness which is described as "a normative identity, discourse, ideology, and structure operating to preserve and magnify its dominant status" (p. 149). In response to a critical turn in Intercultural Communication research, there have been increasing numbers of Critical Intercultural scholarship attempting to decenter whiteness and dominant structures of power (e.g., Calafell, 2020; Eguchi, 2013/2019; Ferguson, 1990; Halualani & Nakayama, 2010; Nakayama & Martin, 1999; Willink et al., 2014; Yep, 2003/2017). By decentering whiteness, I mean what Nakayama and Krizek (1995) called an

act "to deterritorialize the territory of 'white,' to expose, examine, and disrupt" (p. 292). Thus, to decenter also means to deconstruct and decolonize the epistemological tradition of whiteness. To name a few examples, Griffin (2010) evaluated the possibility of critical race theory from a critical black feminist standpoint to deconstruct the Eurocentric epistemologies and practices of law by centering the everyday experiences of people of color. Halualani (2008) complicated the politics of diaspora and decentered-ness of indigenous identity positionalities through the sociohistorical power of colonialism and globalization. Prasad (2015) proposed performative writing of embodied experiences in ethnographic research as a way to identify and critique colonialism.

The dominant status of whiteness works in favor of the superiority of the White race over people of color. But simultaneously, whiteness refers to "a *historical systemic structural race-based superiority*," (Wander et al., 1999, p. 15, emphasis in original) which the definition of whiteness is distinctively different from a racial designation of *White*. In this vein, whiteness is not just about the discourse of race; it is rather a sociohistorical system of power that recenters the invisibility and universality of white supremacy (Calafell et al., 2020). Here, I attend to Shome's (1999) conceptualization that, "Whiteness is not just about bodies and skin color, but rather more about the *discursive practices* that, because of colonialism and neocolonialism, privilege and sustain the global dominance of white imperial subjects and Eurocentric worldviews" (p. 108, emphasis in original). This means, whiteness does not simply refer to a racial category of White. Discursive practices can be ideational, symbolic, a realm of meanings, and autonomy of relational communication, and whiteness works *discursively* to construct imbalanced power dynamics in society.

Shome's (1999) articulation of whiteness as *discursive practices* disrupts racial and geopolitical boundaries. To put it briefly, whiteness can also be reproduced by non-White, historically marginalized identities and communities through (un)conscious practices, embodiments, and performances of *white* power and privilege. For example, my positionality insinuates material relations to whiteness. I am a Japanese citizen, heterosexual, cisgender, male, middle-class, English-speaking, able-bodied, (white) Western-educated, a transnational subject who has lived in the U.S. for the past five years. Here, I critically reflect on my identity because I am speaking about whiteness from a privileged position. Originally coming from Japan (in other words, the Global North) with a non-immigrant visa signifies my international mobilities, technological accessibilities, economic resources, and social capital.

As a critical scholar in the U.S. academia which is historically rooted in white colonialism, imperialism, and elitist nature, my ability to speak about whiteness denotes an inescapable, paradoxical, and conflicted positionality within the discourse of whiteness. Moreover, in this study, the lived experiences of Japanese men may elucidate their contradicting positionalities in-between privilege and marginalization. As cisgender heterosexual Japanese men, their identities insinuate the sociohistorical power hierarchy of Asian hegemony, patriarchy, and cisheteronormativity. But simultaneously, their everyday experiences are racialized, gendered, and sexualized in the U.S. racial formation. Thus, examining whiteness in this study is not only to look into marginalities and oppressions of communities but also helps me to interrogate the nuanced, complex, and contradicting systems of power within the spectrum of privilege and marginalization.

Extending beyond the U.S. context, whiteness *travels* (Shome, 1999) and can be

*glocalized* (Asante, 2016) in this global world. Asante (2016) defined the notion of

glocalized whiteness "as a mode of rethinking the globalized construction of whiteness,

which is reproduced to distance itself from the general conception of whiteness yet

constituted locally to reflect the naturalizing and normalizing process of white-supremacist

social order which produces domination" (p. 90). *Glocal* represents the condition in which

both *global* and *local* mutually define and create meaning altogether (Suganuma, 2012). For

instance, Japan, because of the history of colonization of Asia and

internationalization/Westernization, has a connection to imperial whiteness that is constituted

locally to (re)produce dominant structures. With the discursive practices of glocalized

whiteness, Japan has been positioned as an economically and technologically progressed

hegemony of Asia (Sekimoto, 2014). While Japan's historical, cultural, and political contexts

of glocalized whiteness are not entirely the same as practices of whiteness in the U.S., the

historical continuum of recentering and resecuring the (white) power remains its domination

globally. In this vein, Japanese identity insinuates a privileged class status in relation to

whiteness and diplomatic relationships in transnational contexts. Clearly communicating the

positionality informed by the whiteness framework is particularly important in this research

because the lived experiences of cisgender U.S.-based Japanese men in heterosexual online

dating are shaping or shaped by particular systems of social institutions such as race, gender,

sexuality, class, and more in the U.S.

**Whiteness & Japanese/American Identity.** As whiteness strategically recenters the

dominant matrix of power in global contexts, I highlight how whiteness is (re)produced and

embodied in Japanese and Japanese American bodies. To illustrate the nuances of

Japanese/American identities and cultures and their relationality to whiteness, I introduce a theoretical and conceptual lens of Japaneseness. I argue that Japaneseness is a similar notion to whiteness, working as a hegemonic ideology to strategically maintain the power of dominant social systems and structures. Here, in examining the voices of Japanese/American people in the U.S., I must acknowledge the historical and cultural differences between Japanese and Japanese American people. For example, the history of Japanese Americans shows geographical, cultural, and societal differences from Japanese people in Japan. But simultaneously, while sociohistorical contexts of Japanese and Japanese American identities are different, I assert that Japanese men share their identities as people of Japanese ancestry in the U.S. Thus, I study both Japanese and Japanese American men collectively as *Japanese men* to illustrate their racialized experiences of gender and sexuality in the U.S. In this way, it is important to consider Japaneseness as a culturally specific lens pertaining to Japanese identity and culture that helps to further interrogate how Japanese and Japanese American identities are positioned and/or positioning Japanese/American people in relation to whiteness in the U.S.

Japaneseness comes from a Japanese term/concept, *nihonjinron* (日本人論 [literally, theories/discussions of Japanese people]) which originated from the nationalistic, male-oriented, and masculinist discourse of reconfiguring Japanese identity in response to Japan's internationalization/Westernization during the 1970s and 1980s (Akagawa, 2014; Kawai, 2015; Toyosaki & Eguchi, 2017). Historically, *nihonjinron* has emerged and theorized through Japan's social and political movement of modernization at the end of the Meiji era (1868-1912). In the process of internationalization and Westernization, Japan's relation with Western cultures and societies became particularly important to recuperate economic stability

and reinforce Japanese pride, patriotism, and nationalism after the defeat in WWII (see Akagawa, 2014). Thus, Japaneseness is conceptualized and theorized through a political intention of reconfiguring Japanese identity in relation to Western cultures and values as superior (Kawai, 2015; Toyosaki & Eguchi, 2017). For example, Western ideas such as American exceptionalism and the American dream are constituted as a normative interlocutor in Japan, and "[t]he particularity of Japan is always thought out in reference to the generality or universality of the West" (Satsuka, 2009, p. 71). While Japanese national identity is constructed through the strategic hybridization with the West, Western ideas soak into Japanese society and become the *normalized* desire for the West and Western values (Toyosaki, 2011; Toyosaki & Eguchi, 2017).

Akagawa (2014) emphasized that "the belief in the purity of Japanese culture" (p. 126) is engrained in the notion of Japaneseness as a historical legacy. For example, in 2020, the deputy prime minister, Taro Aso (麻生太郎) had publicly announced that Japan is a nation with a single race (Yamaguchi, 2020). Aso said in his speech, "No other country but this one [Japan] has lasted for as long as 2,000 years with one language, one ethnic group and one dynasty" (Yamaguchi, 2020, para. 3). This statement is severely criticized in and outside of Japan because of the ignorance of Japan's racial and ethnic diversity; however, it showcases the normalization and naturalization of homogeneity in public discourses. This contemporary public remark by Aso exemplifies how the logic of Japaneseness as the historical continuum silences and excludes indigenous ethnicities such as Ainu (アイヌ民族) and Okinawans (琉球民族), Blacks, Whites, Latinos, mixed-race/ethnic people, and other Asian ethnicities from the *pure* Japanese. Therefore, I argue that Japaneseness imposes "a particular racial logic that celebrates nationalistic purity (i.e., homogeneity) of the Japanese

as 'normal,' simultaneously, disavows abnormality which does not follow its purity"
(Kimura, 2021b, p. 257). Japaneseness informs the sociohistorical construction of race and
racial ideology in relation to discourses of gender and sexuality in Japan which also exists as
a form of national identity.

Specifically, this racial/ethnic purity of Japanese identity is often determined by the
symbolism and relationality of blood which denotes the masculinist, patriarchal, and
cisheteronormative construct of Japaneseness. Robertson (2005) argued that "Blood remains
an organizing metaphor for profoundly significant, fundamental, and perduring assumptions
about Japaneseness and otherness; it is invoked as a determining agent of kinship, *mentalité*,
national identity, and cultural uniqueness" (p. 329, emphasis in original). In this vein, the
blood-based criteria of Japaneseness should include Japanese Americans as *nihonjin* (日本人
[literally, Japanese people]), people of Japanese ancestry. However, in Japan, Japanese
Americans are excluded from the categorization of *nihonjin* because of their lack of Japanese
traits such as language, citizenship, and cultures (Yamashiro, 2017). Therefore, conversing
the politics of Japanese American identities with the notion of Japaneseness is crucial to
challenge the homogenizing discourse of Japanese identity. I problematize the normalized
understanding of Japaneseness as a singular concept. Rather, I situate Japaneseness as
multiple and multilayered processes of identity construction (Eguchi & Kimura, 2021).

As Kinefuchi (2008) defined Japaneseness as "relational, contested, contextual, and
discursive processes," (p. 92) I connect a strategic homogenizing discourse that strategically
conceals multiple layers and intersections of identities and cultures with that of whiteness.
While Japaneseness and whiteness are theoretically and conceptually distinctive and different
notions in terms of their historical, cultural, and political contexts, both notions exist as

hegemonic processes which dominate, manipulate, and control certain individuals and communities' ability to (re)act in certain societal structures. Therefore, in this study, I situate that Japaneseness is not equivalent, yet similar to the discursive practices of whiteness that secure dominant power structures, homogenizing particular bodies as Others. In this vein, through the relationality between whiteness and Japanese/American identities and cultures, Japanese/Americans have strategically been homogenized as Asian/Americans or *honorary whites* and excluded as Others or *forever foreigners* in the U.S. (Tuan, 1998).

This othering of Japanese/Americans in the U.S. racial formation is historically apparent through political strategies of inclusion and exclusion induced by whiteness. For example, Saranillio (2018) reminded us that Japanese and Japanese Americans had considered as "aliens ineligible for citizenship" (p. 102) during and post WWII contexts. Moreover, he underscored that the shift of terminologies from *Jap* to *Japanese American* during and after WWII elucidates the process of a national project on racial inclusion in the U.S. But simultaneously, Saranillio (2018) stressed that "the inclusion of Japanese Americans can be tolerated so long as they, too, play the role of subordinate [white] supremacy" (p. 109). Here, the use of *Japanese American* strategically signified a colorblind antiracist discourse and concealed or justified systemic racism in the U.S. Thus, these historical, cultural, and political tensions demonstrate how Japanese/American identities became the product of U.S. hegemony and whiteness under the national project.

Subsequently, I assert whiteness is not the only discursive practice of power linked to Japanese/American identity and Japaneseness. Said differently, only focusing on the relationality between whiteness and Japanese/American identity is rather too simplistic for examining narratives about Japanese men in online dating. For example, discourses of

blackness, Chineseness, Koreanness, and other forms of Asianness in relation to Japanese/American identity should impact how Japanese men seek and build romantic or sexual relationships in online dating. Moreover, examining Japanese/American identity beyond the link to whiteness may elucidate the messy and meaningful intercultural and interpersonal understandings about the everyday life of Japanese men, masculinity, and heterosexuality in global contexts.

In contemporary society, Japanese/Americans' racism toward Black people and anti-blackness is persistent (Fujino, 2008; Russell, 2008). Simultaneously, blackness has been fetishized by Japanese men and women (Cornyetz, 1994). Taking the increased popularity of hip hop music in Japan as an example, Cornyetz (1994) argued that "Hip hop style, which is marked in Japan with black skin, is interwoven with the phallus as a signifier of a subtext of masculine, heterosexual *body* power" (p. 115; emphasis in original). Lyrics and performances of hip hop symbolically encode the sexual and erotic message about phallic empowerment. Cornyetz further asserted that Japanese youth have been impacted by the popular images of blackness in constructing their gender identity and sexual desire. In particular, the fetishization of blackness has become a simultaneous indication of threat and desire. For Japanese men, black masculinity which includes dominant images of massive penis and phallus is superior in terms of phallic empowerment. In this vein, Japanese men are "materially and symbolically demasculinized" (Cornyetz, 1994, p. 115) in relation to blackness. Thus, blackness may play a role of threat to Japanese men within the heterosexual system of masculinity. For Japanese women, masculine images of blackness are often eroticized; hence, Black men are desired in heterosexual sexual or romantic relationships which ultimately emasculate Japanese men (Cornyetz, 1994). But simultaneously,

stereotypes and misconceptions of framing Black people as sketchy, violent, and drug dealers continue to marginalize Black lives and maintain anti-Black racism in Japan and the U.S. (Haruka, 2021; Russell, 2008). These stereotypes and misconceptions may significantly impact how Japanese men and women seek relationships in online dating.

In another layer, anti-Chinese and anti-Korean racism have historically been engrained and notable in relation to Japanese ethnocentrism since Japanese colonialism in Asian countries (Baudinette, 2016; Eguchi, 2021; Goh, 2019; Iwabuchi, 2013; Roth & Fischetti, 2020). Here, the Chinese and Korean are not the only target of antisemitism. Rather, this includes other Asian ethnicities through the complex geopolitical tension and power dynamics. To name a few examples, issues of Senkaku Islands (尖閣諸島) dispute, the official's visit to Yasukuni Shrine (靖国神社), Japan's History textbook reform, and comfort women are still highly controversial topics in negotiating today's inter-/intra-Asian diplomacy and political relations. These issues are controversial because of Japan's political fixation or concealment of the actions of the Empire of Japan during and after WWII.

As I previously mentioned, because of Japanese imperialism and colonialism, Japan has been inaugurated as the hegemony of Asia (Sekimoto, 2014). This means, Japanese identity and Japaneseness already entail historically constituted nationalism, privilege, political and economic power, and international competency in the present moment. In this vein, I must account for the historical, cultural, and political contexts of identity politics and how Japanese men discursively negotiate the structures of power and their masculinity beyond the realm of whiteness. Simultaneously, the rapid economic growth in China and the global market of K-pop represent high levels of visibility and international competency of China and Korea. For example, if a matched partner is a fan of BTS (a popular K-pop boy

band), their perspectives about Asian countries and masculinities may impact the overall online dating experiences of Japanese men. Hence, in addition to the social institutions of whiteness, it is also important to examine how relationalities between Japanese/American identity and blackness, Chineseness, Koreanness, and other Asianness influence Japanese men's narratives and interactions with others in online dating. Therefore, to complicate the relationalities between whiteness and Japanese/American identity, I underline the significance of historical and geopolitical tensions pertaining to Japanese/American identity beyond whiteness. In further applying the theoretical framework of whiteness in this research, the following section attends to the particularity of the studied space — how whiteness recenters and reclaims its dominant power in online space.

**Whiteness in Online Space.** To situate whiteness in this study, I must address how whiteness permeates online space because this research examines the everyday narratives of Japanese men in the online dating space. Before addressing whiteness in online space, I clearly define what I mean by *space* in this research. The notion of space has become a scholarly keyword for interrogating human behaviors and communication (Martínez Guillem, 2019). Bourdieu (1996) described the notion of space as follows:

> [A] set of distinct and coexisting positions which are exterior to one another and which are defined in relation to one another through relations of proximity, vicinity, or distance, as well as through order relations such as above, below, and *between*. (p. 11, emphasis in original)

For Bourdieu (1996), space is a complex relationality that glues human beings and the world within a specific context. However, the definition of space cannot be clear-cut as it is discursively enacted in multiple ways (Martínez Guillem, 2019). For example, I draw on

Mohanty's (1987) understanding of *location* as not equivalent but similar to *space*. Mohanty (1987) denoted the politics of location as "historical, geographic, cultural, psychic and imaginative boundaries which provide the ground for political definition" (p. 31). Location does not mean a *fixed* location; however, it implies multiple sites among "cultures, languages, and complex configurations of meaning and power" (Mohanty, 1987, p. 31). Similarly, space can be defined and applied in multiple ways such as physical, social, political, communal, public, private, imaginative, metaphorical, and institutional.

A few examples illustrate how the idea of space is applied in Communication. Borrowing Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenological conceptualization of space, Sekimoto (2012) revisited the relationality of the body and space that, "space is neither objectively universal nor subjectively unified; rather, space is the backdrop upon which one's historically formed self is enacted and constituted" (p. 235). This inseparable relationality between the body and space demonstrates how the notion of space emerges from the discursive practice of human communication. Na'puti (2020) approached space through a decolonial framework of oceanic rhetoric which "encompasses a maneuvering beyond *terra firma* sense of the 'field,' shifting from landcentric orientations toward Oceanic/watery resonances of communication phenomena" (p. 96, emphasis in original). This idea of space is communicated through an act of deconstructing the *field* of academia to a more fluid sense. Na'puti (2020) disavowed the centricity of the U.S. and Western theories and methodologies by centering the Pacific as a space of human connectivity and fluidity.

Altogether, I draw on Martínez Guillem's (2019) articulation of space as "a structured and (re)structuring force that regulates broader social relations and, at the same time, can be reinvented to serve strategic purposes" (p. 76). This definition of space as a strategic social

force insinuates that it is intentionally enacted through human relations. In defining the notion of space, I view this intentional and strategic force in human communication paradoxically. On the one hand, space is a site of inclusion, equity, and social justice like the aforementioned critical scholars' academic commitment and contribution. On the other hand, space is also a site of exclusion, inequity, and social injustice. Importantly, the relationships between inclusion and exclusion are not either-or. Space both includes and/or excludes certain bodies based on the contexts. In this vein, I argue that space is a simultaneous work of possibility and impossibility of belonging — one's body is located in a specific space where multiple boundaries are intentionally and strategically structured or (re)structuring im/possibility of belonging. Therefore, I define space as a site of the interplay between inclusion and exclusion where individual positionalities and relationalities of cultural groups are shaped through communication.

Highlighting how whiteness permeates online space, as a crucial reminder, online space and communication are not free from social injustices such as racism, sexism, hate speech, and other forms of discrimination and marginalization. Rather, online space is suffering from the "unbearable whiteness of being" (Tal, 1996; see also, Gajjala, 2014; Nakayama, 2020). Nakayama (2017) underscored the rise of new media, user-generated content such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and other digital environments, and how whiteness is repositioned and strategically embedded as the dominant force in such platforms. As one of the examples, Nakayama (2017) argued how the nature of anonymity in the digital space induced racist posts using N-word against the former President Obama on Twitter. But simultaneously, Twitter also became a space for resistance against the dominant power as represented through the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter movement. As Nakayama

(2017) revisited, "Whiteness … is not simply about the ways that white racial domination is reproduced. It is also about the ways that people resist that domination" (p. 71). Here, Nakayama (2017) stressed the possibility of online space that can resist and challenge the strategic (re)positioning of whiteness. Therefore, studying online space and communication in relation to whiteness allows researchers to interrogate new ways of knowing how whiteness reclaims and maintains the dominant power in this digital era.

> Importantly, Toyosaki (2016) reviewed the epistemology of whiteness, as follows: Whiteness research is not about something; whiteness is not an object of study outside us. Whiteness is us, our avowed, avowing, ascripted, ascribing, relational, socially situated, and historicized race-based identity construction in our everyday lives that reinforce, ignore, benefit from, abet, acquiesce to, suffer from, question, ponder, struggle with, resist, and/or challenge whiteness and its hinging effects on other oppressions. (p. 252)

Whiteness is not just a communication phenomenon that is happening somewhere out there, rather, we as human beings are living *with* whiteness as a part of the system of (re)producing power, privileges, and oppressions. I concur with this epistemology to interrogate the contradictions and relationalities of studying identity politics and whiteness in a digital environment. Examining whiteness in digital space, Nakayama (2017) envisioned the possibility of exploring online space that "can create new ways of whiteness that are not older forms of whiteness, but new, progressive, reconfigured whiteness that lives alongside, not dominating, other racial identities" (p. 71). Therefore, this study adds some knowledge about whiteness in a relatively new or understudied platform of communication that needs further academic attention (Nakayama, 2020).

In reconfiguring whiteness in online space, an underlining idea of centrality informs the epistemology of whiteness. As Nakayama and Krizek (1995) articulated, whiteness is "a cultural construction as well as the strategies that embed its centrality" (p. 297). Here, the notion of the center is always assumed to be the center. For example, Anglo-Americans were framed to be the center in U.S. racial history and whiteness. On the note of centricity and whiteness, Ferguson (1990) reminded us that:

> The place from which power is exercised is often a hidden place. When we try to pin it down, the center always seems to be somewhere else. Yet we know that this phantom center, elusive as it is, exerts a real, undeniable power over the entire framework of our culture, and over the ways we think about it. (p. 9)

Therefore, identifying the invisible center and deliberately making it visible is a key approach for critical scholars to interrogate and decenter the dominant framework of whiteness. Specifically, in conducting this research which focuses on the online dating context, I ask, what does whiteness look like? How is whiteness a construct that (de)centralizes the knowledge of Others? How does whiteness reposition its centricity and dominance in the digital environment and dating relationships? Like the movements on social media such as #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, and #jesuispasunvirus (French: I am not a virus), (how) do people resist whiteness and its domination of power in online dating? How do Japanese men experience and present their identity, masculinity, and heterosexuality in relation to whiteness? To answer these questions, theoretical frameworks of racialized identity politics along with the social institutions of whiteness further guide my analysis of U.S.-based Japanese men's lived experiences. Thus, the next section provides the literature

review of another theoretical lens of this study: racialized gender, (hetero)sexuality, and relationalities.

### *Racialized Gender, (Hetero)Sexuality, & Relationalities*

**Racialization of Japaneseness.** A theoretical ground of whiteness informs its relation to the racialization of gender, (hetero)sexuality, and relationalities. In this project, I examine cisgender U.S.-based Japanese men in heterosexual online dating, which the subject group of this study is already constituted within the historical context of U.S. racialization and racial formation. For example, once I moved to the U.S., my Japanese identity instantly became *Asian*. I call this phenomenon the racialization of Japaneseness. In everyday interactions, people simply see me as *Asian* or *Asian American* based on my phenotype: facial attribution, hair texture, eye color, skin color, height, body shape, and more. Because of how I look, my ethnicity and Japanese national identity become ambiguous or cannot be identified by others in the U.S. Moreover, whenever I fill out documents asking for demographic information such as the U.S. Census, medical questionnaires, and online dating profiles, I check the box myself as *Asian/American* if no other options are given. In this vein, my identity is *dis/oriented* between *being Japanese* and *becoming Asian* in the U.S. (Eguchi, 2015; Nakayama, 2004; Sekimoto, 2014; Toyosaki, 2011).

According to the U.S. Census, the *Asian* race is articulated as "having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam" (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2020). However, Asian loci and ethnicities are not specified other than the listed origins in this definition. Further, the monolithic and simplistic labeling of *Asian* as a catch-all term for multiple ethnicities is

problematic because this very act of Western-centered labeling is rooted in the discourse of

colonialism and Orientalism (e.g., Eguchi, 2013; Espiritu, 1992). These critiques can also be

applied to a historically situated labeling of *Asian American*.

**Racialized Labeling of Asian/American.** In conversing about the U.S. racialization

of Asian/American identity, the question of "who 'counts' as Asian" continues to inflate

debates in public discourses (Kambhampaty, 2020, para. 18). For example, in the 2020 U.S.

Presidential race, Andrew Yang, who is of Taiwanese descent, was often framed as "*the*

Asian candidate"; however, Yang's rival candidate, Kamala Harris' Indian heritage was

largely unrecognized or lacking public attention during the campaign (Kambhampaty, 2020,

para. 5, emphasis in original; see also, Sullivan, 2019). This example reflects the popular

image of Asians as people from East Asia such as China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, and

people from Southeast and South Asia are often marginalized in public discourses.

Consequently, in the U.S. context, narratives and representations of Asian/Americans are

often dominated by Chinese, Japanese, and Korean identities and cultures, continuously

marginalizing other ethnic groups such as Arabs, Indians, Indonesians, Muslims,

Palestinians, Philippines, Vietnamese, and more. Moreover, the U.S. Bureau of Census

created a new category, *Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander* in 2000 to differentiate it

from *Asian* and acknowledge the unique history of struggles. But still, the question of "who

'counts' as Asian" remains its controversy over the U.S. racial labeling.

But simultaneously, this research draws on Sekimoto's (2014) assertion that "terms

such as 'Asian' or 'Asian American' remain useful insofar as they are utilized to critique

gendered and racialized identity politics, rather than as authentic and essentialized locations

of difference" (p. 383). Moreover, Espiritu (1992) explained that panethnicity is a politically

strategic mechanism allowing ethnic (sub)groups to gain their agency as minoritarian

subjects by cultivating meaningful solidarity within dominant political structures.

Consequently, given the topic and subject group of this study, I still value the use of *Asian*

and *Asian American* to critically engage with discourses of racialized gender,

(hetero)sexuality, and relationalities.

        As my Japanese identity became racialized as an Asian/American in the U.S. (i.e., the

racialization of Japaneseness), I connect my experiences with other U.S.-based Japanese men

through conducting this study. Thus, I am also interested in critiquing how Japanese men

embody Asianness in online dating through their transnational transition from Japan to the

U.S. Within the context of U.S. racialization, some experiences may highlight parallel or

similar patterns and themes among Asian ethnic groups who are living the everyday as

*Asians* in the U.S. However, I believe that the dynamics of racialized interactions and

narratives are different in the Asian ethnic group and intra-ethnic-group experiences. For

example, my experiences of being a heterosexual cisgender man seeking relationships may

drastically be different from that of non-Japanese Asians in the U.S. Importantly, Japanese

identity insinuates situated knowledge of sociohistorical, cultural, and political contexts. As

aforementioned, historically, Japan has been the hegemony of Asia as a product of

colonialism and imperialism (Sekimoto, 2014). Moreover, the Japan-U.S. relation has been

shifting its dynamics during and after WWII in the forms of anti-Japanese sentiment,

concentration camps, and security treaties. In popular culture, contemporary Japan often

appears as *Cool Japan* on various media platforms such as anime, manga, J-pop, games, TV

shows, movies, arts, and more. Therefore, in examining the micro/meso-level narratives of

U.S.-based Japanese men in heterosexual online dating, discourses of Asian/American

identities and cultures allow me to identify the historical continuum of U.S. racialization and critique the idea of Asianness at the macro-level.

      **Racialized (Hetero)Sexuality & Masculinity.** As Yep et al. (2020) maintained, Intercultural Communication research is about "relationalities in/through differences" (p. 20). Particularly, this study directs multiple (racialized) relationalities such as ethnic, gender, (hetero)sexual, class, and romantic in the online dating space. Narratives of Japanese men showcase such relationalities in/through everyday interactions, embodiments, and performance of identities, cultures, and space. To elucidate nuances and complexities of relationalities in this study, I analyze racialized (hetero)sexual politics of Japanese men and masculinity in relation to sociohistorical works of power in the U.S. By sexual politics, I mean "a set of ideas and social practices shaped by gender, race, and sexuality that frame all men and women's treatment of one another, as well as how individual men and women are perceived and treated by others" (Collins, 2004, p. 6). It is a messy system of interlocking social institutions which is informing and shaping how we come to understand sexual identities and practices. In interrogating sexual politics, masculinity and femininity are inseparable ideas that constitute our everyday life within the gender and sexuality systems. Masculinity is socially constructed characteristics and attributions associated with male individuals in a dialectical opposition to femininity which associates with female individuals (Oh & Kutufam, 2014). Through the U.S. history of social order that positions white, middle-class, and heterosexual men as the dominant hierarchy of society, a normative concept of what Kimmel (1994) called *hegemonic masculinity* is established as the ideal of masculinity. This concept helps to critically intervene the power relations in studying racialized (hetero)sexual politics of masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity is defined as "the *current* definition of masculinity that is the ideal on which it *depends on* the subordination of femininity *and* the marginalization (and colonization) of *other forms of masculinity*" (Cheng, 1996, p. 179, emphasis in original). For example, gender roles and agencies of how men and women are supposed to act and their imbalanced power relations in society are deeply influenced by the notion of hegemonic masculinity. The power dynamics between masculinity and femininity are materially evident in patriarchal systems of economy, institutional authority, political leadership, workplaces, family, kinship, and more. In the context of desirability, hegemonic masculinity continues to define the ideal image of the attractive man. Taking an American weekly magazine, *People*'s annual covers for Sexiest Man Alive as an example, the majority of men who have been selected as the *sexiest* men are heterosexual cisgender White men with celebrity statuses. As of 2020, there are only five people of color who had been featured on the magazine cover since the beginning of 1985. As Malone (2020) explained that Sexiest Man Alive "serves as a benchmark for male attractiveness in Hollywood," (para. 2) this magazine symbolizes the construction of (white) hegemonic masculinity which marginalizes non-white masculinities as less sexy, attractive, and desirable.

Specifically, Asian/American men have never been nominated to make the magazine cover except Keanu Reeves who partially holds an Asian heritage. This phenomenon is the material reality of what Eng (2001) asserted as *racial castration*, racialized discourses of gender and sexuality on Asian/American male bodies. Reviewing literature and scholarship of Asian/American gender and sexuality is essential in this project because Japanese men are racialized as Asian/American men in daily interactions in the U.S. This means, critical conversations about Asian/American gender and sexuality illuminate the macro-level

understandings of the U.S. racialization and racial formation, and inform the studied group of U.S.-based Japanese men in online dating.

According to Eng (2001), Asian male bodies are *castrated* through the discursive effect of heterosexuality and whiteness as the universal norm. Thus, the work of whiteness creates the dominant narrative of Asian/American men "as feminized, emasculated, marginal subjects of representation" (Nguyen, 2014, p. 25) within the hegemonic masculinity. By positioning heterosexuality and whiteness as an inseparable set of the dominant ideology, Eng (2001) articulated how Asian/American identity formation is informed by the logic of whiteness. For example, Asian/Americans are often conceived as relatively short in height, not masculine, geeks, and having small penises (Han, 2015). Washington (2016) asserted that "Asian/American men in particular are depicted as anti-sexual — they are so not sexy/sexual that not only do they not get the girl, but their mere presence is taken as a joke" (p. 63). Moreover, feminized stereotypes of Asian men have been established and reinforced through public discourses and media representations to maintain the superiority of White men and masculinity as the ideal, norm, and universal (Eng, 2001; Shimizu, 2012). Within the discourse of hegemonic masculinity, Asian/American men "seem not to be strong, independent, or masculine enough" (Chen, 1996, p. 57). These characteristics associated with Asian male bodies and masculinity continue to frame Asian/American men as less desirable because they cannot fulfill the criteria of hegemonic masculinity. Consequently, Asian/American men are not preferred as lovers or dates for female individuals who are seeking heterosexual romantic relationships (Chen, 1996; Tsunokai et al., 2013; Washington, 2016).

Han (2015) challenged the normative assumptions of "the desirability of masculinity and whiteness and the hierarchy of sexuality in the Asian American community by disrupting the taken-for-granted heterosexuality that has come to define the 'Asian American' experience" (p. 20). Attending to Han's assertion, I must acknowledge the cisheteronormative assumption and heterosexist genealogy in Asian/American literature as I explore the heterosexual politics of Japanese men and masculinity for this project. Moreover, not all Asian/American men are feminized and sexualized in the same way. Because their experiences may vary depending on the context, it should elucidate the contradicting positionalities and relationalities within the spectrum of privilege and marginalization. But simultaneously, as Chou (2012) asserted, Asian/American scholarship still lacks its attention to heterosexual Asian/American men because many studies focus on the experiences of women and gay men. Thus, I view that Asian/American politics of gender and (hetero)sexuality are still underexamined across interdisciplinary fields (Chou, 2012). In this vein, this project not only does illuminate the lived experiences of U.S.-based Japanese men in online dating but also contributes to insert culturally specific politics of gender and (hetero)sexuality in Asian/American scholarship and Critical Intercultural Communication.

**Queer Intercultural Communication.** Through the frameworks of racialized gender, (hetero)sexuality, and relationalities, this study seeks possibilities in queering heterosexuality, desire, and space. In order to use *queer* as a lens to unpack intercultural communication in this study, it is important to define the concept of queerness. By queer I do not simply mean an umbrella term for categorical differences in gender and sexuality, rather, it stands for "both a noun (e.g., being) and a verb (e.g., doing) to signify nonnormativity within particular cultural systems" (Yep, et al., 2020, p. 20). For example, I challenge the

normative systems of heterosexuality, desire, and space in the name of queering, centralizing the lived experiences of cisgender U.S.-based Japanese men in heterosexual online dating. In so doing, I underline that Japanese/American and/or Asian/American men experience disenfranchisement within the normative system of heterosexuality. I maintain that they may not always benefit from the structure of cisheteronormativity in desiring romantic or sexual relationships. But simultaneously, it is also important to reiterate that they are not simply the victims of cisheteronormativity, rather, they consistently embody and practice privileged positionalities as cisgender heterosexual men in the U.S. social structures. Subsequently, acknowledging the online space as a relatively new and unique platform for seeking interpersonal relationships, I view that online dating queers a conventional understanding of space where physical, face-to-face, and in-person interactions take place.

While I acknowledge the genealogy of queerness as a feminist, lesbian, and gay studies tradition, I approach that queerness is not just about the identity categories and acts of gender and sexuality (Yep et al., 2019). Attending to Abdi and Calafell (2017), queerness is broadly defined as "a practice or verb, as well as a continually shifting identity and space" (p. 362). It is a deconstructive notion to imagine alternative ways in order to protest against what is considered natural, normal, ideal, or universal in societal structures (Alexander, 2008; Eguchi & Calafell, 2020; Sullivan, 2003; Yep et al., 2019). Further, on the note of a theoretical process of queer in Intercultural Communication, Yep et al. (2019) defined *queering* as "a collection of multifaceted methods used to deconstruct the artificial stability of hegemonic sexuality and other interconnected identity categories (e.g., race, class, gender, body, and ability, etc.)" (p. 8). Queering is a political analytic to destabilize cisheteronormativity. Thus, through a theoretical and methodological lens of queerness, this

study attempts to deconstruct a seemingly stable and fixed category of heterosexuality. Particularly, I situate U.S.-based Japanese men's narratives as a location to critique the larger U.S. hegemonic discourses of gender and sexuality. For example, I examine how U.S.-based Japanese men experience their masculinity and heterosexuality within the dominant (white) structures of gender and sexuality such as hegemonic masculinity and cisheteronormativity.

Heterosexuality is a category of sexual identity with an underlying idea of one's preference of sexual and/or romantic relationships is with the person of opposite sex or gender. Moreover, heterosexuality is not simply about sexual relationships: it involves the organization and maintenance of marriage, family, kinship, non-sexual practices of gendered domesticity, and binary structures (i.e., cisheteronormativity). However, drawing on Butler's (1990) argument, systems of gender and sexuality are embodied and fluid processes of the body. Moreover, as Sullivan (2003) argued, "not all heterosexuals are situated socially, politically, economically, in the same way" (p. 49). Elaborating on Butler and Sullivan's statements, I question the normative structure of heterosexuality as a fixed category. For example, heterosexual men who do not fit the ideal image of (white hegemonic) masculinity are often perceived "as something other than 'normal'" (Sullivan, 2003, p. 49). Within specific historical, cultural, geopolitical, and social contexts, heterosexuality is normalized through the strategic (re)positioning of whiteness, patriarchy, and colonialism. If the fixated categories are socially constructed and policed by cisheteronormativity, is there such thing as *naturally*, *fully*, or *100%* straight? Thus, this project moves away from the theorization of heterosexuality as a monolithic institution and practice by engaging with heterosexuality as a fluid process of sexual being and doing (Jackson, 2020).

In problematizing heterosexuality, many queer and feminist scholars have critiqued its heteronormative assumptions and maintenance of male domination in relation to the gender system (Abdi & Van Gilder, 2016; Atay, 2015; Chávez, 2013; Collins, 2012; Eguchi, 2014/2021; Eguchi & Calafell, 2020; Eng, 2001; Han, 2015; Suganuma, 2012). For example, Yep (2017) inserted ongoing normative relations of sex, gender, and desire that "maleness entails masculinity and masculinity is expressed through sexual desire for the 'opposite' sex [i.e., a woman] and femaleness entails femininity, which is expressed through sexual desire for its 'opposite' [i.e., a man]" (p. 116). This is what Butler (1990) called a *heterosexual matrix* that entails rigid idealizations of the binary conceptualization of gender and desire with regard to the discourses of sex and sexuality. Revisiting existing scholarship on the racialization of Asian/American identities, Asian/American masculinities have been feminized, subordinated, and marginalized by the systems of hegemonic masculinity in the U.S. Hegemonic masculinity is something that is unattainable or impossible to fulfill for Asian/American men in the systemized racialization. In this way of positioning Asian/American gender and sexuality, Asian/American masculinities are often associated with femininity and queerness (Eguchi & Ding, 2017; Eguchi & Starosta, 2012; Eng, 2001; Han, 2015; Lopez, 2014; Nakayama, 2009; Shimizu, 2012).

Moreover, this study engages with intercultural and interpersonal interactions in the digital space. Specifically, I view online dating sites as digital or new media that transmit human communication through technologies and virtual platforms such as the Internet, mobile phones, and computers. On the note of new media in intercultural communication, Chen (2012) highlighted that "New media not only influences the form and content of information/messages, but it also affects how people understand each other in the process of

71

human communication, especially for those from different cultural or ethnic groups" (p. 3). As technologies continue to innovate and evolve their forms, how we make sense of our cultures, communicative behaviors, and communities shift continuously.

With this shifting nature of new media, human communication becomes more fluid, dynamic, and unstable. Importantly, new media breaks the limits and boundaries of time and space (Atay, 2021; Chen, 2012; Nakamura, 2002). For example, in the context of online dating apps, people can participate in dating by creating profiles, swiping left/right, and texting anytime on multiple online dating apps at the same time. Moreover, people can build relationships without the restriction of geographical locations and time differences. Generally, interactions on online dating apps start via virtual communication (e.g., matching and texting), gaining fluidity and flexibility as opposed to traditional relationship-seeking where people communicate with limits and boundaries of time and space. Furthermore, how people participate in online dating during the COVID-19 pandemic has also shifted the way of thinking about the online dating space. Therefore, intervening about online dating communication, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, queers conventional ways of relating with others and studying intercultural and interpersonal communication in and across academic and everyday contexts. In queering space of intercultural communication, I examine how the interface of online dating allows Japanese men to queer their identities through understanding and presenting themselves in certain spaces.

**Japanese Masculinity.** While literature and scholarship underscore feminized and undesired Asian/American masculinity in relation to the dominant ideology of hegemonic masculinity, I do not intend to essentialize the context of Asian/American masculinity through a simplistic view. Rather, I emphasize that Asian/American masculinity is not a

singular concept. Asian/American masculinity have historically been racialized and feminized; however, that is not the only case. As Thangaraj (2016) asserted, "there is never a singular category of masculinity in play … there are multiple *masculinities*" (p. 47; emphasis in original) in exploring Asian/American sexual politics. For example, as a Japanese man, my conceptualization, understandings, and experiences of manhood and masculinity may be different from that of Chinese men (or other non-Japanese Asian ethnic men). Moreover, critically reflecting on my heterosexually-centered perspectives about masculinity, I have (unconsciously) learned to associate masculinity with physical strength and features such as being tall, built-up muscles, and performances in playing physical sports. This association already embodies and (re)produces the hegemonic ideology of masculinity, reinserting the heteronormative assumptions of what it means to be masculine. Simultaneously, I often perform gentle and kind characteristics through smiling pictures on my dating profile and communicate with others which may not be considered as masculine in the U.S. and Western cultures and societies. Thus, in this study, I consider a multifarious aspect of *masculinities* (plural) that can uncover differences, contradictions, and relationalities within and beyond the racialized category of Asian/American by inquiring how Japanese men view and practice their masculinity.

Tuning to the specificity of the studied group of U.S.-based Japanese men, this research elucidates culturally specific knowledge about Japanese men, masculinity, and heterosexuality that may not fit in or comply with the U.S. cultural and social concept of hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality. In the Japanese popular cultural scene, Darling-Wolf (2004) contended that there has been a shift in rethinking Western-centric hegemonic masculinity as the ideal masculinity in Japan. By critically analyzing the performances of

SMAP, a famous Japanese boy band idol group, Darling-Wolf (2004) underlined the culturally constituted hybridity and fluidity of Japanese masculinity that rejects or dismantles the essentialized notion of hegemonic masculinity. For example, SMAP's representations often challenge the normative conceptions of gender and sexuality in their live concerts and media coverages through their performances of crossdressing, wearing make-ups, crying, and sex appeals. Even when some of the group members play characters on TV shows and dramas who commit violent acts that secure a traditional masculine feature, such violent acts are ultimately rejected and denied in media representations. In this vein, Japanese masculinity reconfigures the (feminine) values of sensitive, emotional, kind, and caring attributes as the socially accepted idea of *being a man* and challenges hegemonic masculinity (Darling-Wolf, 2004).

In my experiences of growing up in Japan, I have witnessed the shifting materiality of Japanese masculinity by consuming cosmetic products for men. Grocery stores often dedicate an entire section or corner to advertise cosmetic items specifically for men, and the notion and practice of male beauty became socioculturally accessible and accepted. Iida (2005) emphasized that this cultural trend of redefining *new* masculinity is a strategy for Japanese men to "refute silently imposed ideological assignments and cultural expectations to reproduce the conventional masculine order in the cultural hegemony of Japanese society" (p. 57). Elaborating on the culturally specific formation of masculinity, this project elucidates how U.S.-based Japanese men understand and present their *Japanese masculinity* in online dating.

In my personal experiences of living in the U.S., I became self-conscious about how I may not be desirable, attractive, and manly enough in online dating, internalizing the

construction of feminized masculinity as a complex. But simultaneously, I see myself exclusively selecting profile pictures on my online dating apps that are smiling or laughing. By expressing friendliness, tenderness, and kind impressions (or somewhat traditionally considered as *feminine* and *soft* features) through the selection of profile pictures, I am performing what Darling-Wolf (2004) emphasized *Japanese masculinity* as a strategy to represent my attractiveness in online dating. In this vein, I brought my Japanese masculinity that is socially constructed through living in Japan and performed in the U.S. However, literature about Japanese men often do not thoroughly discuss how Japanese men actually understand and present their masculinity in everyday interactions in the U.S. To connect my personal experiences to larger discourses and societal structures in the U.S., this study attempts to bring more voices from Japanese men and their lived experiences as evidence or material consequences of the macro contexts of power such as historical, cultural, and sociopolitical. Then, in examining Japanese men's narratives through this study, I ask, how are U.S.-based Japanese men's masculinity racialized and sexualized in online dating? How do Japanese men in the U.S. define Japanese masculinity or generate the meaning of being masculine? Do Japanese men conform to hegemonic masculinity in their self-presentation and performance of masculinity? Or, do they resist and challenge the dominant ideologies that often control the way they act in everyday interactions with others?

In this chapter, I briefly introduced the historical contexts of Japanese im/migration, Asian/American gender and sexuality, and online space and dating in the U.S. in order to illuminate some foundational scholarly conversations about this study's topic of inquiry. Existing scholarship highlighted the troubled positionalities of Japanese/American people between the rhetoric of *model minority* and *yellow peril* and framings of *honorary whites* and

*forever foreigners* (Kawai, 2015; Tuan, 1999). Their identities are continuously *dis/oriented* through the U.S. racial formation by being racialized as Asian/Americans — meaningful differences of Asian ethnicities are concealed through the process of essentialization (Eguchi, 2015; Nakayama, 2004; Sekimoto, 2014; Toyosaki, 2016). Moreover, cisgender heterosexual Japanese men's contradicting positionalities and relationalities underscore the intersecting social institutions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and more that shape their everyday interactions and narratives within the spectrum of privilege and marginalization. Elaborating on the historical grounds of the topic, theoretical frameworks such as social institutions of whiteness and racialized gender, sexuality, and relationalities offer epistemological and methodological lenses to better understand issues of racialized experiences of Japanese men and guide my analysis of their narratives. In the next chapter, I discuss the methodological design and process for this study.

**CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY**

Before introducing the methodological design and process of the study, clearly situating my paradigmatic belief and standpoint as a researcher is first and foremost a crucial process in conducting this qualitative research. Because I am a producer of the interpretation/critique in this study, I must articulate where my academic perspectives are grounded and how the processes of interpretation/critique are shaped. Subsequently, I address academic motivations and procedures for collecting and analyzing the studied text. I begin this chapter by providing my paradigmatic positionality.

**Paradigmatic Positionality**

I primarily position myself in a critical theory paradigm in Communication. This paradigm specifically focuses on critiquing the relations of power which is often invisible, unconscious, and silenced under the dominant structures of communication and knowledge (Martin & Nakayama, 2006). Locating myself in Intercultural Communication, a critical approach privileges a power-based perspective to challenge how cultural individuals and/or groups are positioned through unseen histories, sociopolitical structures, and conditions (e.g., Halualani & Nakayama, 2010; Halualani et al., 2009; Mendoza et al., 2002). Given the genealogy of Communication where the aspects of cultures and power had been taken for granted, a critical approach to Intercultural Communication research provides analytic skills for researchers to pose new and/or provocative questions about complex issues of identities and cultures (e.g., Calafell, 2021; Calafell & Delgado, 2004; Eguchi, 2015/2016; Griffin, 2012/2015; Lechuga, 2020; Willink et al., 2014).

Drawing on Prasad's (2005) articulation of the paradigmatic confluences, I value the heuristic approach of analyzing the text from multiple paradigmatic views. As I introduced at

the beginning of this section, I position myself mainly in a critical theory paradigm that specifically focuses on knowledge and understandings of any phenomena that are mediated by historically and socially constructed power relations (Halualani & Nakayama, 2010). But simultaneously, I also borrow a constructivist perspective to complement a flexible, rich, and enhanced understandings of human experiences and relationalities, making better sense of *what* and *how* I see the messy communicative interactions in society. Because the constructivism paradigm aims to understand and re-/co-construct the text, the method tends to be hermeneutical.

By hermeneutical, I mean a continuous process of interpretation and understanding between the researcher, text, and context (Ono, 2020). Said differently, I need the text to make sense of my analysis, and without the sociohistorical context, I will not be able to interpret and analyze the text. This process of contextualizing and re-contextualizing the text is referred to as the hermeneutic circle (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007). This circular understanding of hermeneutics is imperative to conduct research in interdisciplinary fields because the researcher, text, and context are already existing in particular social systems or structures (Keane & Lawn, 2015; Madison, 2012). Thus, the constructivist perspective instructed by hermeneutics helps me to interrogate the dynamics of what is going on with the text that I am analyzing in this study.

The critical theory paradigm is the accumulation of knowledge that has to do with critiquing the power, conditions of the structure, and historicization of the text (Conquergood, 1991; Halualani & Nakayama, 2010). Thus, the ontological and epistemological assumptions are different between the constructivist and critical theory perspectives. However, the paradigmatic confluence highlights the inseparable relationalities

between different paradigms. For critical theory, critiquing the sociohistorical structures of power requires particular interpretations of the text and context. This means, the constructivism or interpretive paradigm is already incorporated within the process of knowledge production through critical theory perspectives. Given this active construction and co-creation of (inter)subjective knowledge, I situate myself within the mix of constructivism and critical theory paradigms for conducting research. In this study, I borrow Muñoz's (1999) elaboration on the concept of *critical hermeneutics* which "register copresense of sexuality, race, class, gender, and other identity differentials as particular components that exist simultaneously with one another" (p. 99; see also, Prasad, 2005). Because identity politics is complex and messy, I interpret and critique the interlocking relationalities of social institutions that inform and shape everyday experiences.

**Methodological Design**

Followed by my paradigmatic positionality as a researcher, I explain the methodological approach for conducting this study. As Jackson II et al. (2007) distinguished the differences between method and methodology, the method describes *how* the researcher collects qualitative texts and the methodology explains *why* to collect and analyze them in certain ways. In this section, I showcase the utilization of methodology to address a theoretical problem to be studied and practical ways to engage with Japanese men's narratives.

*Intersectional Perspective*

As the existing scholarship on whiteness, U.S. racial formation, racialized systems of gender and sexuality, and Asian/American identities and cultures illustrate the interlocking institutions of power, attending to the concept of intersectionality is imperative in this study

79

which interrogates the complexities of identity politics. I adopt an intersectional approach as a methodological framework to examine the lived experiences of U.S.-based Japanese men in online dating. An intersectional perspective is a methodological analytic that is informed by the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; Hancock, 2007). To adopt an intersectional perspective as a methodological framework, I first conceptualize the definition and scholarly conversations of intersectionality by revisiting its historical context and genealogical significance. Then, I describe how I situate an intersectional perspective in this study.

*Intersectionality as Methodology*

The Combahee River Collective Statement in 1977 is one of the foundational documents of a black feminist movement to address systemic oppression against Black women in relation to race, sexuality, and class. Developing the concepts of identity politics and intersectionality, The Combahee River Collective (2009) contended that they strive for developing critical analysis and practices to challenge the dominant structures of power that oppress interlocking identities such as race, gender, sexuality, and class. Accordingly, Crenshaw (1991) coined the term *intersectionality* as an academic framework to rethink identity as a multidimensional process. As a Black feminist in Legal studies, Crenshaw (1991) challenged how the legal system fails social justice in response to anti-racism and continues to marginalize Black women's lived experiences. In early theorization, intersectionality emerged as a concept "to denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimension of Black women's employment experiences" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244). Subsequently, Crenshaw (1991) developed intersectionality as a tool to resist a single-axe approach in identity research and reconfigure various ways of examining women-of-color experiences. A single-axe approach explores identity through

simplistic or monolithic attention to social institutions such as race-only, gender-only, and sexuality-only focused research.

In Critical Intercultural Communication research, intersectionality has become a crucial framework to dismantle the imbalanced power structures by centering marginalized voices and bodies in scholarship (e.g., Calafell, et al., 2020; Griffin, 2010/2015; Gutierrez-Perez, 2018; Halualani & Nakayama, 2010). Yep (2016) explained that the concept of intersectionality is about how interlocking vectors of differences such as race, gender, sexuality, class, nation, and more shape one's identity and everyday experiences within the spectrum of privilege and oppression. Moreover, Eguchi and Kimura (2021) asserted that intersectionality is a powerful methodology to deconstruct the maintenance of power and hierarchical structures that affect the individual's everyday contexts (see also, Calafell et al., 2020; Chávez, 2012/2013; Johnson, 2014).

As articulated by Yep (2016) and Eguchi and Kimura (2021), intersectionality is not merely about the difference of identity categories. Rather, it must be understood as a powerful analytic for embodied lived experiences that exist "*at multiple axes of domination and oppression*" (Calafell, et al., 2020, p. 21, emphasis in original). For example, queer-of-color and transgender scholarship in Communication have applied the concept of intersectionality as a guiding framework to unpack the nuanced and complex systems and embodiment of identities, power, and marginalization (e.g., Alexander, 2010; Calafell, et al., 2020; Chávez, 2012/2013; Eguchi & Calafell, 2020; Johnson, 2014; LeMaster, 2015/2018). Alexander (2010) examined complex relationships of Black male to male and student-teacher mentorship in the classroom environment at a predominantly White university. Reflecting on the racialized and gendered positionality of Black men in the classroom, he critically

analyzed the student-teacher positionality within cultural performances of Black masculinity which also need to be situated within the classroom where the power of institutional authority plays an important role. Intersectional reflexivity allowed him to reconfigure the possibility of establishing reciprocal cultural membership and allyship. Ding and Rasmussen (2020) examined the media representation of Asian/American masculinity in Warner Bros. Pictures' *Crazy Rich Asians*. They situated intersectionality as a conceptual lens to critique the ways in which the film reproduces and reinserts the strategic logic of whiteness. Specifically, the film's portrayal of Asian/American masculinities is what they assert *neutralized* to conceal the histories of hypersexualized and hyposexualized Asian/American men by celebrating the Western-centric aesthetics of desirable and attractive Asian men in the center stage of the screen. By utilizing intersectionality, they were able to examine the dominant structure of white hegemony and hetero-patriarchy that continues to other and marginalize the experiences of non-Western people of color. As illustrated by Alexander (2010) and Ding and Rasmussen (2020)'s work with intersectionality and intersectional perspective, they challenge the dominant ideological structure of whiteness and cisheteronormativity which (re)produces systems of inequality and marginalization.

While intersectionality is a provocative framework to address how intersectional identities collide and link with one another within historical and social contexts, scholars also critique the misuse of intersectionality in recent scholarship on identity politics (e.g., Calafell, et al., 2020; Choo & Ferree, 2008; Eguchi & Kimura, 2021; McCall, 2005). Calafell et al. (2020) underscored what Bilge (2014) called *whitening intersectionality* which white feminists appropriate the concept as a raceless paradigm to maintain and reinsert the color-blind logic, re-centering whiteness in Communication scholarship. It is often used

uncritically by scholars just because it is academically edgy, progressive, and liberal. As they further reminded us, "occupying and acknowledging intersectional positionalities in scholarship should be the ethical responsibility" (p. 28). In so doing, Calafell et al. (2020) situated the concept of difference as an important site of ideological and cultural struggles that are reproduced through the historical systems of othering and inequality. Consequently, they collected voices of historically silenced or marginalized identities such as women, people of color, queer, and nonbinary people of color in order to showcase their embodied experiences and knowledge through interlocking relationalities of differences. Therefore, scholars must underscore the history and genealogy of intersectionality in their theoretical and methodological approach not to (re)insert the dominant systems of power such as whiteness, racialization, patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and cisheteronormativity.

Intersectionality rejects a single-axe approach in examining identity politics (Crenshaw, 1991). In other words, intersectionality views multiple and multilayered social identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and more are mutually constructing and shaped by the systems of power (Chou, 2012). To elucidate multiple dimensions of messy human interactions and social structures, situating multiple social institutions as interlocking vectors that shape identities and cultures should be a key assumption for using intersectionality as methodology.

In this study, an intersectional perspective is an important methodological framework to interrogate the complex intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality within the discourse of identity politics. But simultaneously, I must attend to the ongoing critique of intersectionality as demonstrated above (e.g., Bilge, 2014; Calafell, et al., 2020; Eguchi & Kimura, 2021; McCall, 2005). In so doing, I draw on Calafel et al.'s (2020) approach to the

concept of difference that is not merely a categorical difference and multiplicity. Rather, it is a political site that simultaneously elucidates ideological struggles and positionalities of power. I look into U.S.-based Japanese men's narratives and how the differences of their interlocking social identities such as race, gender, sexuality, and class are shaped by the sociohistorical structures of power such as whiteness, patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and cisheteronormativity. Specifically, I examine contradictions and relationalities of identity politics which cannot be explained by analyzing the relationship of either-or. For example, cisgender Japanese men are privileged in the U.S. structure of hetero-patriarchy. But simultaneously, they are historically racialized, gendered, and sexualized as feminine, inferior, and threatening *others* within the white supremacy. In this way, I situate Japanese men's experiences and differences of social identities within the spectrum of privilege and marginalization in order to elucidate sociohistorical structures of power that shape the politics of identity. By using an intersectional perspective, I envision the possibility of dismantling the dominant matrix of power by complicating the understanding of Japanese men's lived experiences at the intersection of both privilege and marginalization.

Concurring with Crenshaw's (1991) theorization of intersectionality as "a basis for reconceptualizing race as a coalition between men and women of color" (p. 1299), I use an intersectional perspective to further complicate multidimensional identity politics and positionalities of privilege and marginalization through the interrogation of racialized narratives of Japanese men, masculinity, and heterosexuality. I understand that an intersectional perspective is a particular way of interpreting and analyzing the text guided by the theory of intersectionality. Chávez (2012) asserted that an intersectional perspective recognizes that not all individuals experience their identity, culture, and power in the same

84

way. This is an important assertion because, while Japanese men can be categorized as a monolithic or collective identity, their experiences in online dating may differ based on different positionalities of identities and how they engage with the structures of power. Not every Japanese man experiences their identity in the same way. For example, my dating experiences in the U.S. do not speak *for* all Japanese men's dating experiences in the U.S. Depending on how other Japanese men understand their identities and interact with others in a variety of contexts, their lived experiences are different and uniquely situated within the specific time, space, and social structures. Thus, by intersectional in this study, I mean by a methodological perspective to study multiple, multidimensional, and multifarious social relations. These social relations are unequal, fluid, nuanced, complex, and mutually shaped as culture and identity consistently shift. In studying these relations, I methodologically commit to complicate the dominant ideas such as hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality by looking into Japanese men's narratives in everyday contexts that cannot be defined or explained in a monolithic way. Therefore, an intersectional approach allows me to centralize the voices and embodied lived experiences of Japanese men and critique the dominant power structures such as whiteness, racism, sexism, patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, cisheteronormativity, and more.

As the genealogy of intersectionality highlighted, an intersectional approach elucidates multiple axes of identity politics. Han (2015) reminded us that interrogating identity politics is "a messy process through which race intersects with sexuality, gender intersects with race, sexuality intersects with gender, etc., and all exert pressures on each other" (p. 19). Race cannot be understood without considering gender, sexuality, and other social institutions into an account for the analysis (Wander et al., 1999). Altogether,

including discourses of gender and sexuality in studies of race and racialization is important in light of the genealogical development of intersectionality in interdisciplinary fields. In so doing, Critical Intercultural scholars must situate our bodies as the central body of knowledge and continue to challenge the dominant systems of power (McIntosh & Eguchi, 2020). With this methodological commitment, an intersectional perspective allows scholars to examine the politics of identity. In utilizing an intersectional perspective, including reflexivity is an essential practice because my viewpoint and analysis of the text will never be neutral. Specifically, I interpret and critique the everyday narratives of Japanese men from a particular scholarly belief as illustrated in my paradigmatic positionality. Moreover, the analysis is processed through my lens of sense-making of the text which is constructed based on my personal and social identities and cultures. Thus, in what follows, I highlight the importance of including reflexivity in an intersectional perspective.

### *Critical Reflexivity*

In adopting an intersectional perspective, critical reflexivity is another essential methodological commitment in this study's critical approach to the text. Griffin (2012) explained that the practice of reflexivity is crucial labor for researchers to be ethical in their studies. To put it simply, reflexivity is a researcher's role in the production of knowledge and a process of critically reflecting and positioning the researcher's self within a particular study. On the note of self-reflexivity, Griffin (2012) further underscored that being self-reflexive "requires uprooting our biases, fears, and prejudices while paying close attention to how dominant ideologies inform our understandings of who we and others are" (p. 214). Thus, turning attention to the lens of self allows researchers to acknowledge how the researcher interprets and analyzes the text in certain ways. Nakayama and Krizek (1995)

argued that the practice of reflexivity offers an important direction in examining the discourse of whiteness. It encourages scholars to consider what has been silenced, invisible, or missing in academic discussions. Subsequently, reflexivity calls scholars to articulate the researcher's position vis a vis social and academic structures. As whiteness strategically works to conceal sociohistorical inequality and maintain and/or reinforce the dominant structures of power, reflexivity allows scholars to question how the knowledge itself is produced from a particular individual, scholar, and institution (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995).

In Critical Intercultural Communication scholarship, critical reflexivity has been emphasized as a crucial academic commitment. To name a few examples, Collier and Muneri (2016) defined critical reflexivity as "reflections about the complex relationship between processes of knowledge production, contexts of such processes, and involvement of producers" (p. 640). Moreover, McIntosh and Eguchi (2020) brought reflexivity in order to (re)locate the body as the central site of knowledge in embodied experiences of power. They underscored that "The way the researcher's body is a subjective site of knowledge and analysis shapes a process of research that always already requires critical interrogation" (p. 401). Specifically, they asserted that scholars often fail to account for their own race and whiteness in existing Intercultural Communication research. Therefore, as I engage narratives as a politically and socially constructed text of inquiry in this study, it is important to note that *I*, as a producer of research, am also a sociopolitical subject who interprets and analyzes the text through my own lenses. These lenses are not neutral filters for interpreting and analyzing communicative acts. In other words, they are heavily manipulated by individual and social identities such as my cultural backgrounds of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, education, family, and more. In this study, I use critical reflexivity to

continuously question how I produce the analysis and interpretation/critique of the text by interrogating my positionalities. I question my subjective views of knowledge that construct or impact my lens for making sense of what is going on in the text in a certain way. This is an ongoing process of reflecting on my scholarly belief and program and questioning the ways in which my identity influences how I view the text and social structures. In this vein, critical reflexivity forces me as a researcher to carefully reflect on my lenses in unpacking the text through multiple and multilevel intersections between the researcher's self, text, and context (Ono, 2020).

In this study, I examine the lived experiences of Japanese men in the U.S. through the perspective of being a transnational subject originally from Japan who has simultaneously experienced both privileges and marginalization in the U.S. I must account for my privileged and marginalized positionalities in the process of interpretation and analysis of the text. For example, my racialized identity as an Asian denotes the racial hierarchy of being situated as the model minority in relation to other minority groups. Because of this belief of the model minority, people may see me as hardworking, economically stable, and successful rather than lazy, poor, and unsuccessful which these impressions may influence how other people interact with me in everyday contexts. Simultaneously, the racialization of Asian/Americans insinuates the historical context of racism, sexism, and marginalization within the white supremacy in the U.S. Thus, my experiences are not either privileged or marginalized. Rather, they insinuate complex positionalities within the spectrum in-between privilege and marginalization depending on the contexts. This self-reflection demonstrates how I engage with the text and context through this study. I practice critical reflexivity by acknowledging that each research has its own theoretical, methodological, and paradigmatic dimension in

producing knowledge and ethical responsibilities of the researcher, research design, and

research process. As an ongoing process of scrutiny, I must be sensitive not only to the

knowledge that can be gained by conducting this study but also to the limitations of my

engagement with the text and the research design. While I acknowledge that this research

topic can be studied in many ways from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, I specifically

examine identity politics in the discipline of Critical Intercultural Communication. Therefore,

the produced knowledge in this study can be limited from, for instance, Media Studies

perspectives because of who I am as a researcher and how I come to know about the

knowledge through the research practices.

Subsequently, I turn to the discourse of reflexivity with an intersectional perspective

which is what Jones and Calafell (2012) called *intersectional reflexivity*. As a critical

methodology, Jones (2010) emphasized that intersectional reflexivity requires the often-

uncomfortable processes of self-implication and acknowledgment of interlocking

positionalities of both privilege and marginalization. LeMaster (2018) also noted,

"Reflexivity is uncomfortable because it forces you to acknowledge that you are complicit in

the perpetuation of oppression" (p. 124). For example, I have repetitively highlighted that I

am inescapable from the social institutions of whiteness such as privileged positionalities and

maintenance of the power structures. My academic knowledge, skills, and practices have

been cultivated in U.S. higher education where the notion of space already denotes the

history of colonialism and imperialism, Western-centric, exclusive, cisgender male

privileged, heteronormative, and elitist natures. However, my academic work critiques

whiteness while I am in the space of whiteness (i.e., higher education) where it is maintaining

and reinforcing my privileged status as a researcher. In this vein, I often feel uncomfortable

with these inescapable implications and paradoxes conducting research as a Critical Intercultural scholar. Moreover, as I engage with the narratives of Japanese men, I am not simply reporting their stories in my writing. Rather, I actively construct the interpretation and critical analysis of their lived experiences. Then, I must continuously ask myself how my interpretation and analysis came about as I conduct this study. What do I know about Japanese men and their narratives? How do my interlocking positionalities of both privilege and marginalization play in the process of my interpretation and analysis of Japanese men's narratives? As intersectionality illuminates simultaneous works of domination and oppression, locating myself at the point of both privilege and marginalization is imperative in applying an intersectional perspective to identity politics. Therefore, I methodologically commit to critical reflexivity as an essential practice to be intersectionally attentive in Critical Intercultural Communication.

**Methodological Process**

Given the paradigmatic positionality and methodological design, this section elaborates on the overall methodological process of the study by explaining the procedures of how I conducted this study in detail. Specifically, the aforementioned four research questions guide how I collected and analyzed Japanese men's narratives such as the following. First, I ask, what are the experiences of Japanese men participating in heterosexual online dating? Second, how do Japanese men present their identities and make sense of their identity presentations in online dating? Third, how do transnational transitions to the U.S. shape Japanese men's experience of online dating through living in the liminal space? Fourth, how do U.S.-based Japanese men's dating experiences alter, shape, and reify racialized gender and sexual politics associated with ongoing sociohistorical issues of Asian/American

identities? To answer these questions, I illustrate how I collected, analyzed, and interpreted/critiqued the text instructed by methodological perspectives in this study.

*Collecting Narratives*

**Online In-depth Interview.** As I have indicated in the previous chapters, this study complicates the understanding of the everyday experiences of U.S.-based Japanese men and how they experience masculinity and heterosexuality in online dating. To achieve and answer proposed goals and research questions, I selected an online in-depth interview as the method of this study. Interviewing is a useful qualitative method to collect people's subjective experiences and sense-makings of intercultural interactions (Halualani et al., 2006). While it is a well-known method employed by many qualitative scholars, I also assert that the epistemology of interviewing can be paradoxical. For example, the interviewer (or researcher) needs to prepare broad enough and open-ended questions and invite in-depth narratives to let the interviewee become the narrator. But simultaneously, the meaning aspect of those in-depth narratives is difficult or impossible to assume and predict prior to conducting the actual interview (Chase, 2005). Therefore, balancing the stability of prepared structures and flexibility in the process of interviewing is one of the challenges for researchers in this particular qualitative research method.

While there are various forms and techniques for interviewing such as ethnographic, informant, respondent, focus group, and structured interviews, I selected one-on-one, semi-structured, and narrative interviewing as the method of this research. Because narrative interviewing assumes that one will come to know about themselves through their everyday performance of narratives, personal narratives elucidate how the stories are told in relation to the social systems of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and more (Cuádraz & Uttal,

1999). In this study, a one-on-one interview is appropriate to collect unique and in-depth individual experiences from the participants. A semi-structured interview allows me to underline the overall direction of the interview, facilitating questions that are aligned with related topics of the study. This means, a fully structured interview is not suitable for my approach to narrative interviewing because the structure of this study's interview needs to be broad and flexible enough to collect rich and in-depth texts from participants (Chase, 2005). Personal narratives are unique and specific; therefore, I must simultaneously facilitate the interview with a particular direction and be flexible to change or adopt questionnaires for collecting their rich stories as I interview them.

For the sampling strategy, I mainly used snowball sampling. I started recruiting participants who I know personally, then, asked them to refer others who might fit the criteria for this study's participants. Snowball sampling is appropriate for this study because I interview participants' lived experiences in relation to dating and social identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and more. When asking about issues of dating, gender, and sexuality, trust between the researcher and interviewees is particularly important because the topic of conversations can be sensitive or may require some levels of comfortability for participants to share with me. In Japanese society, getting to know someone through *siriai* (知り合い[literally, acquaintance]) or *tomodachi* (友達 [literally, friend]) is a culturally meaningful process of relationship building, and can establish a sense of trust between people by having a mutual acquaintance or friend (Igarashi et al., 2008). In gathering nuanced and dynamic narratives from participants, snowball sampling helped me to build meaningful relationships and trust with them. Hence, I engaged with the interview process and Japanese men as a complete-member studying their lived experiences from inside-within perspectives

(Toyosaki, 2011). I also used the social media post as another strategy to collect participants for this study which the calls for participants were posted on social media including Facebook and Email Listserv. However, I could not collect any participants through the social media post method.

Here, I acknowledge that a geographical location may be an important factor because dating cultures can be very different whether there is a large Japanese community around the participants or not. For example, California is known as one of the historical sites for Japanese immigration and communities established in the U.S. Japanese men's dating experience may drastically be different for people from elsewhere. While I took a geographical location into account when I analyzed the narratives, I did not limit the geographical area in sampling participants because of two reasons. First, my goal is to collect a variety of lived experiences pertaining to online dating apps that can be both location-based and non-location-based. Second, I believe that participants' experiences in online dating are likely to be different depending on their uses of non/location-based apps. Therefore, snowball sampling aligns with my intention for collecting narratives.

Importantly, interviews were conducted via online synchronous video chat in response to the recent uptick of the COVID-19 pandemic. Each interview was recorded upon participants' consent for the transcription in the process of generating the text. To gather in-depth narratives from participants, the duration of online interviews was set to approximately one hour long. However, all the interviews exceeded one hour as interviewees were comfortable or insisted on having longer conversations. For this process, in-person interviews were restricted for avoiding the risk of exposing to or spreading the COVID-19 virus and protecting participants' health situations. Despite the limited choice for the

interviewing platform due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the online interview reduced the time and cost of traveling and gained access to multiple and different geographical locations. Especially with the snowball sampling strategy, the online platform worked well together for me to recruit participants and interact synchronously anywhere on the Internet. Moreover, as this study examines Japanese men's lived experiences in the online space, researcher-participant interactions through the digital environment correspond to the interest of this research. In this vein, the selection of an online interview as the method of this study itself also signifies my intention of conducting the research in the era of new media, moving beyond the conventional ways of interviewing.

To gain technological accessibility as much as possible, I asked about their preference for video chat apps such as FaceTime, LINE, Skype, and Zoom which are increasingly popular apps for people to synchronously communicate virtually. None of the interviewees had accessibility issues with the Internet and Zoom was used for conducting all interviews. While the virtual platform cannot replicate in-person human communication exactly the same, I still value the ways in which the synchronous online interview offers an opportunism to mirror the off-line, real-time interactions (James & Busher, 2012). Thus, my choice of interview strategy reflected the efficiency and do-ability of conducting this study.

Prior to starting each interview, I explained to participants the procedures, risks, confidentiality, and privacy policies involved in participating in the interview. Then, upon their consent for participating in the study, I asked their permission to audio-record the conversations for transcribing and translating purposes. Participants chose pseudonyms before the interview to protect their privacy and anonymity of their identities. When conducting online interviews, interviewees could choose their preferred language between

English and Japanese. Regardless of the language mainly used for the interview, interviewees were free to use English and/or Japanese whenever they want for responding to questions and narrating their stories because sometimes words and/or phrases in Japanese cannot fully be translated into English, and vice versa. Except for one interview, all the interviews were conducted in Japanese. As a researcher who is fluent in both Japanese and English, I was responsible for the translation matters. In preparing for the interviews, I designed the sample interview guide (see Appendix E). I created a series of sample questions because I believe that communication processes are ongoing, unpredictable, and dynamic while I interview Japanese men. This means, I did not ask all the questions that I prepared for the interview. Depending on the responses of participants, the topic of conversations went randomly; therefore, having a series of questions allowed me to be flexible and make sure I asked essential questions in the interview in order to answer research questions. While I used the sample questions as an interview guide, I skipped some questions based on the responses from the interviewees in the actual process of interviewing.

**Participants.** A total of seven U.S.-based Japanese men participated in this study. The overall length of the interviews was 11 hours 12 minutes. In recruiting interviewees for this study, I selected a specific set of demographics as the criteria for people to participate. As I have addressed the goals and purposes of this study in Chapter I, this study examines the lived experiences of cisgender U.S.-based Japanese men in heterosexual online dating. Thus, the relevant criteria for the participant of this study were as follows: interviewees must be cisgender Japanese men who self-identify as heterosexual, and must be between 18 and 50 years old who have lived in Japan for at least 12 years before coming to the U.S. They should have spent time in the U.S. for a minimum of three years. Interviewees must have

experienced participating in online dating in the U.S. at any point in their life. Any online dating apps that are used can be relevant to this research. Without any geographical restrictions, I expect that interviewees come from diverse cultural backgrounds and hold different forms of interpersonal and inter-/intra-cultural dynamics. Additionally, they must be fluent in both Japanese and English.

The minimum age is set as 18 because most online dating sites consider 18 as the legal age of consent. I specified the maximum age to be 50 because I wanted to collect a spectrum of narratives about online dating experiences. While there can be similarities, patterns, and themes of how people understand particular ideologies such as gender and sexuality based on their age groups, I am interested in examining the aspects of nuances, convergence, and divergence that may emerge from their experiences. For example, the experiences of people in their 20s may drastically differ from those in their 40s (and other age groups). Or, experiences of people from the same age group may demonstrate specific patterns and tendencies of communicative practices and perspectives. Moreover, in hopes to gather a spectrum of qualitative texts, I did not select specific online dating apps as the platform for the studied group's online dating participation. Instead, I asked participants in-detail about their experiences with the specific apps that they have used. As I could observe different experiences myself based on using different or multiple apps, gathering information about their reasonings, likes, dislikes, and intentions of using the apps generate unique narratives and findings.

Qualitative research does not intend to generalize the findings and predict patterns of human interactions, rather, it deliberately interrogates the specific and particular (Creswell, 2007). Thus, the researcher must be careful with the sample size of qualitative research that

should not be too big but there should be enough size to collect adequate qualitative texts. In terms of the sample size of the study, there have been discussions and debates about the appropriate sample size for qualitative interviewing (Beitin, 2012). However, there is no magic number for the ideal sample size of qualitative research because qualitative research invites a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches as well as methods. Although the choice of sample size varies depending on the purpose, style, and objective of the interview or the research itself, Creswell (2007) recommended five to 25 participants in order to collect enough texts for qualitatively analyzing the communicative phenomena of the research through participants' experiences and narratives. Considering the intention of qualitative research and recommendation for narrative interviewing collection, my sample size aligned with the purpose of this research: small enough to collect in-depth narratives from the interviewees and analyze them in detail.

*Analyzing Narratives*

To situate an intersectional approach as a methodological analytic in this study, I draw on Bilge's (2009) two-step hybrid approach as a model strategy to analyze my interview narratives. In order to apply intersectionality in unpacking interview texts, Bilge's approach consists of two levels of analysis, combining both text-driven inductive and theory-oriented deductive approaches. As Bilge underscored, analyzing in-depth qualitative interview texts with an intersectional approach is often challenging because the interview text privileges personal accounts and lived experiences. In this study, I privilege voices and narratives of Japanese men's lived experiences. Thus, depending on the level of participants' understanding and consciousness of their social identities such as race, gender, sexuality, and class, how the categorical relationalities and dominant structures affect their lived

experiences may not explicitly be located in their narratives. As Bilge (2009) pointed out, "The tricky point [of the imposition of intersectionality upon the text] is thus using intersectionality without forcing its analytical categories of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc. onto empirical [texts]" (p. 4). Moreover, she further highlighted that the methodological guideline for using intersectionality as an analytic is lacking in academic discourses. Hence, Bilge established this two-step hybrid approach in an attempt to systematically analyze in-depth interview texts through an intersectional approach.

The first level of analysis (i.e., text-driven inductive approach) employs a thematic approach to the raw interview texts, a well-known method/ology in qualitative analysis. In this stage, I asked myself "how individuals view the topic under study without making any assumptions about race, class and gender or how group membership might shape those responses" (Cuadraz & Uttal, 1999, p. 173). Because this first level of analysis is text-driven, I conducted line-by-line open coding and axial coding to unpack raw texts, developing them into categories of concepts and themes. This step is referred to as an open process in which "the research engages in exploration of the [text] without making prior assumptions about what is to be discovered" (Bilge, 2009, p. 5). Thus, themes identified in this step suggest the implicit topic that organizes repeating ideas and/or offers a synopsis that brings meaning and identity to recurrent (patterned) manifestations.

The second level of analysis (i.e., theory-oriented deductive approach) brings theoretical knowledge of intersectionality into the analysis processes for interview texts. Specifically, Bilge (2009) proposed using *a generic intersectionality template* in this stage of analysis in order to deductively analyze the text that is inductively processed in the first-level analysis. Following the text-driven approach, this second-level analysis asks how the

individual accounts and lived experiences are connected to broader social relationalities and

the dominant matrix of power (see also, Cuadraz & Uttal, 1999). For example, a generic

intersectionality template consists of two layers of considerations: Discrete consideration and

intersectional consideration. Discrete consideration asks "How [a social category] informs

this individual account?" Then, intersectional consideration further asks "How [a social

category] interacts/intersects with other social categories in this individual account? *Or*

which dimensions of the experiences are interacting with [a social category]?" In this

template, researchers can flexibly apply each social category that is identified from the first-

level analysis of themes, and it allows researchers to systematically process their analysis

through broader sociostructural relations.

By using Bilge's two-step hybrid approach as an analytical model for this study, I

orient my analysis with an intersectional approach. Bilge (2009) used this analytical model in

her case study about racialized masculinity, and concluded that "intersectionality shows that

not all masculinities are invisible, being associated to majority; some masculinities are highly

visible and pathologized/stigmatized" (p. 17). Specifically, she examined the interview text

with a cisgender Ruritanian man who is from a Middle Eastern background and later

migrated to Canada about how he understands and experiences masculinity in romantic

relationships. Through the first-level analysis of interview texts, she found race as a central

vector, palpable identity to his narratives and lived experiences. Then, the second level

analysis allowed her to analyze race with other core social institutions that were evident in

the text such as class and sexuality in order to complicate the understanding of the dominant

notion of masculinity in Western society. In this way, Bilge's intersectional approach

elucidated the racialized consciousness, subject positions, and identifications in the

individual account as well as complicated the ways in which each social identity interacts or intersects with other social institutions. Therefore, her analytical framework fits the theoretical and methodological goals of this study.

*Interpreting/Critiquing Narratives*

According to Halualani (2010), an in-depth interview is a useful means "to elicit individuals' meanings about complex concepts and experiences in their own words and by their own organizing logics" (p. 308; see also, Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Spradley, 1979). Then, it is a researcher's task to translate their lived experiences and bring them into academic conversations. This translation process can be done through the applications of theory, concept, and researcher's perspectives altogether for making sense of the narratives. Critical reflexivity is particularly important in this process because acknowledging how I come to construct my interpretation/critique of the narratives is an ethical responsibility as a Critical Intercultural scholar utilizing an intersectional perspective. Thus, the interpretation/critique of texts allows researchers to provide insightful readings of the narratives and thicken the analysis. With an intersectional approach in this study, I attempted to make sense of the lived experiences and narratives of Japanese men by looking into the contradictions and complexities of identity positionalities and relationalities with multilayered social institutions. For example, by guiding my analysis and interpretation/critique of narratives through theoretical lenses of whiteness and racialized gender, (hetero)sexuality, and relationalities, micro-level findings (e.g., raw texts from interviewees) can be connected to a meso/macro-level structured knowledge that generates a rich contextualization of identities, cultures, and spaces. Conversely, a meso/macro-level structured knowledge can also inform micro-level experiences. The methodological lens of

intersectionality allowed me to question and further interrogate the relationalities of social identities that form the everyday narratives of Japanese men. Japanese men are living in the historical continuum of racialization in the U.S. while maintaining and reinforcing the privileged position of being cisgender males in the U.S. patriarchal and cisheteronormative system. Then, one of my tasks for the interpretation/critique of the narratives in this study is to bring the voices of Japanese men to the fore and elucidate the historical legacy pertaining to the U.S. racial formation that racializes their experiences of gender and heterosexuality.

In so doing, I draw on Toyosaki's (2011) work of Critical Complete-Member Ethnography (CCME) to orient my epistemological and methodological engagement with Japanese men's narratives. Unlike the traditional foundation of the ethnographical approach in which researchers study about Others as outsiders, complete-member researchers are "full members of a culture they are interpreting and reporting" (Yep, 2004, p. 71). This means, complete-member ethnography (CME) looks into the lived experiences of people from the insider-within perspective, engaging with the narratives as a cultural insider. CCME allows researchers to produce social and cultural interpretations and critiques through speaking with people from the cultural community. This methodological practice of CCME is meaningful in this study because I engaged with Japanese men's narratives as a complete-member who shares cultural systems, meanings, and senses with them. Toyosaki (2011) theorized CCME methodology by identifying three ethnographic approaches as the component of its process: Ethnography of communication (e.g., narratives), critical ethnography (e.g., critical perspective), and autoethnography (e.g., self-reflexivity). These elements intersect with one another to form a methodological approach for researchers to engage with intracultural and dialectical relationships in Critical Intercultural Communication. Thus, in

101

interpreting/critiquing narratives of Japanese men, I situate CCME as underlying

epistemology and methodology in order to reflect on personal accounts of both myself and

interviewees and challenge how the macro-structures of power shape our (i.e., including

myself and interviewees) everyday experiences in the U.S.

As I interpret/critique the experiences of Japanese men, it is important to articulate

how I treat narratives in this study. Chase (2005) defined narrative as a distinctive discourse

of meaning-making. More specifically, it is a sense-making process and/or act of expressing

and interpreting "one's own and others' actions, of organizing events and objects into a

meaningful whole, and of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over

time" (Chase, 2005, p. 656). Moreover, Delgado (1990) framed the narrative as a voice that

can "sharpen our concern, enrich our experience, and provide access to stories beyond the

stock tale … and let us begin to see life through the eyes of the outsider" (p. 109). Thus, the

narrative is a social phenomenon and discipline in human communication and behaviors.

Consequently, Rodríguez (2007) explained that narratives are already integrated as a part of

the reality of social structures. As each individual sees the world through different eyes and

lenses depending on certain cultural, social, political, and historical contexts, backgrounds,

and positionalities, experiences and stories come from a variety of localities. Simultaneously,

each narrative or story is not an isolated fragment of everyday life. It is retrospectively

connected to and constituting social systems and circumstances, embodying an overall

subjective situation and reality in the present moment (Chase, 2005; Delgado, 1990;

Gadamer, 1989).

Alvesson and Sköldberg (2017) reminded us that "there is no such thing as

unmediated data or facts; these are always the results of interpretation. Yet the interpretation

does not take place in a neutral, apolitical, ideology-free space." (p. 14) Therefore, I approach narrative in this study as an already interpreted and temporal subjective text produced through a sociohistorical institution and structure. More specifically, I engaged with narratives in a sociological sense that it is always mediated, constructed, and politically performed (Chase, 2005). In situating narratives as the main text to be analyzed, I attend to a common critique of narrative inquiry which is its focus on "the individual [context] rather than the social context" (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 157). In this vein, the narrative inquiry must not be simply about exploring individual experiences. Rather, I treat those individual experiences as always political. Therefore, in this study, I intend not only to capture the individual narratives but also to make sense of the current racialized narratives of Japanese men and how the racialized masculinity and heterosexuality are shaped and presented within the sociohistorical imbalanced systems of power. This interplay between micro, meso, and macro discourses is specifically beneficial for producing meaningful relations between individual everyday experiences, the historical context of Asian/American identities and cultures, existing scholarship on race, gender, and sexuality, and adding some knowledge to Critical Intercultural Communication. According to Bowleg (2008), "the interpretive task for the intersectionality analyst is to make explicit the often implicit experiences of intersectionality, even when participants do not express the connections" (p. 11). Therefore, the tasks for intersectional interpretation/critique of the text aligns with the premise of Critical Intercultural Communication which is to elucidate issues of often invisible power relations and how sociohistorical structures affect the beliefs and attitudes of cultural communities/groups and everyday experiences of people (Halualani & Nakayama, 2010). As illustrated through the process of analyzing narratives in this study, I theoretically

and methodologically commit to make invisible power visible and complicate the understanding of Japanese men's everyday narratives.

In this chapter, I discussed the methodology and method for conducting this study — how I collect, analyze, and interpret/critique narratives as a Critical Intercultural scholar. An intersectional perspective helps me to interrogate the messy processes of intercultural interpersonal interactions within a space where the multiple social institutions such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, and more mutually construct and shape the ways of knowing and communicating with one another. With these theoretical and methodological frameworks, I present the findings and analysis of the narratives in the next chapter.

**CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

In this chapter, I document the narratives of seven U.S.-based cisgender Japanese men about their online dating experiences and demonstrate the analysis of interviews with them. Overall, through conducting the interviews, I find that those men's day-to-day experiences suggest the conditions and structures of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality through a variety of intercultural interpersonal and social relationships with the people around them and space/place such as family, school, work, and politics. This means, many narratives about the online dating space implicate everyday life and interactions with people/space around them in general. For example, their mis/understandings of masculinity and (hetero)sexuality can be cultivated through their relationships with friends and family from the past to present, not exclusively experienced through online dating apps. This means, their behaviors and communications performed in online dating apps are often heavily informed by their everyday experiences outside of the online dating contexts. Thus, while this study examines the U.S.-based cisgender Japanese men's online dating experiences, I treat their narratives regarding lived experiences in the Japan-U.S. space (outside of the online dating space) as equally important as the narratives with direct reference to the online dating contexts. In other words, this study illuminates the interconnectedness between inside and outside of the online dating space, the relational views of how the interviewees' online dating narratives are informed or shaped by their day-to-day experiences, and vice versa.

To showcase the narratives of U.S.-based Japanese men and the analysis of interviews, I present the overarching three themes: *Feeling Un/Attractive: Narratives of Racial/Ethnic Gender, and Sexual Accounts, Feeling Proud: Japanese Exceptionalism and Nationalism in Online Dating*, and *Feeling Transnational: Shifting Identities in Online*

*Dating*. It is important to note that these themes do not exist as completely separate elements. Rather, many of their narratives and my analysis overlap in terms of their situated contexts and relationalities. With an intersectional approach, it is impossible to talk about, for example, issues of race without addressing intersecting politics of gender and sexuality, gender without addressing race and sexuality, and sexuality without addressing race and gender. As Crenshaw (1991) asserted, intersectionality rejects a single-axe approach in examining politics of identity because social identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class are multilayered, mutually constructing and shaped by the systems of power (Chou, 2012). Therefore, I highlight the often invisible and unmarked relationalities of multiple social identities and the spectrum of privilege and marginalization through the analysis of Japanese men's experiences. Specifically, I challenge the centricity of cisheteronormativity that is constantly communicated throughout the interviewees' narratives. In what follows, I start my analysis focusing on the first theme, *Feeling Un/Attractive: Narratives of Racial/Ethnic, Gender, and Sexual Accounts in Online Dating*.

**Feeling Un/Attractive: Narratives of Racial/Ethnic, Gender, and Sexual Accounts in Online Dating**

In this theme, I specifically look into the U.S.-based cisgender Japanese men's experiences of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality that inform and/or informed by the dominant structures of power such as whiteness, Japaneseness, patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and cisheteronormativity. This theme consists of three sub-themes such as *struggling to match*, *white masculine idealism*, and *reifying heterosexuality*. In the first sub-theme, I documented interviewees' overall experiences of online dating and unpacked what kind of challenges they have been facing through. In this process, I examined the

implications of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class materialized through their lived

experiences. The second and third sub-themes centered on the issues of gender and sexuality

and interrogated how Japanese men's experiences inform intersecting identity politics of

race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and cisheteronormativity.

### *Struggling to Match*

During the interviews, the most commonly shared experiences among interviewees

were their struggles with matching with other female users in online dating apps. When I

asked them a question, "how do you describe your overall online dating experiences?" all of

them expressed their feelings of difficulty in participating in online dating. Yusuke expressed

that "Being able to match itself is very difficult. Even if I could match, I feel 70% of the

people who I matched with won't reply to my messages, so, it's very difficult." Takumi also

shared his feelings and experiences, as follows:

> Thinking about the overall online dating experiences in the past, yeah, it's poor, it's
>
> not good, you know. I don't know but, like Tinder in the U.S. and when I entered the
>
> online dating market, I thought I was not popular, or I should say, I was undesirable.

They specifically referred to their *match-ritsu* (マッチ率 [literally, matching rate]) has been

low when they have participated in online dating apps. As the premise of online dating apps,

you must *match* with other users in order to start exchanging text messages and developing

romantic/sexual relationships. However, as commonly shared by the interviewees, they have

been struggling to match with others; hence, they often have not been able to even start their

interactions with others in the apps. In addition, as Yusuke said, he feels participating in

online dating apps is particularly difficult because he cannot develop a relationship even if he

could match with someone due to their lack of responses. As I was listening to and having

conversations with interviewees, there were many times I reacted "共感します (I

sympathize with you)" to them based on my own experiences of participating in online

dating apps and struggling to match which resonated with the interviewees' overall

impressions of the online dating participation.

When they describe their feelings of difficulty in participating in online dating apps,

they also compare their experiences with other people's experiences such as friends and

coworkers. For example, Teru described his experiences, as follows:

In my experience, if I send a message to 100 people, the likelihood of getting to the

stage of actually seeing them in-person would be 40%. 60% is like, getting tired of

along the way. And among those 40% of people I could actually meet in-person,

eventually developing into a physical relationship would be half of them, that's my

impression. Maybe it's just because I'm not good at developing relationships, but

actually, I have a friend who is hafu of Japan and the U.S., and nearly 100% of the

time, he can develop the physical relationship with matched people after meeting with

them in-person.

Like other interviewees, he expressed how unlikely for him to be able to develop

relationships in online dating contexts. At the same time, he compared his situation with his

hafu friend. *Hafu* (ハーフ) is a Japanese racial/ethnic category that generally refers to a

person who is born to parents of Japanese and non-Japanese ethnicities (e.g., Arudou, 2015;

Iwabuchi, 2014; Kimura, 2021b). Teru explained that his friend is born to a Caucasian

American mother and a Japanese father, and he is a foreign-looking hafu Japanese (meaning

that he holds Western/white phenotypes). His comparison with a hafu Japanese friend is

important especially in the online dating context because one's looks and visuals such as

108

facial features, body styles, postures, and bodily expressions are essential components communicated through the online dating profile pictures. For example, in many online dating apps such as Tinder, Bumble, Match.com, and more, profile pictures are the first visual information that the users receive in selecting potential matches. In fact, Teru said the user's face (whether he thinks good-looking or not) is the most influential factor for him to decide on swiping left or right. In Teru's view, his hafu friend can easily match and develop physical relationships with women because of his Western/white phenotypes. This narrative coincides with the discursive practices of whiteness that idealize white bodies – in this context, the superiority of white phenotypes (i.e., facial features) as the ideal (e.g., handsome, good-looking, and stylish) is engrained in Teru's online dating experiences (Murphy-Shigematsu, 2001). Particularly, connecting to Teru's online dating experiences, this superiority of white phenotypes is evident in the discourse of hafu identity in Japan.

In Japanese popular media and entertainment industry, entertainers or celebrities with hafu identity are largely known as *hafu talento* (ハーフタレント [literally, hafu talent]). Because of their white phenotypes, they are often commodified and/or consumed as cool, good-looking, stylish, and fashionable people in Japanese society and the system of racial hierarchy (Murphy-Shigematsu, 2000). Given this cultural understanding of hafu, especially hafu with white phenotypes, Teru finds superiority in how his friend has successfully been able to develop romantic/sexual relationships in the online dating space compared to his experiences of struggling to match. As the scholarship on whiteness illuminate, this racial hierarchy of white superiority is persistent in the U.S. sociohistorical and political contexts. Specifically in the U.S. online dating contexts, studies discovered White men are the most desirable/preferred racial identity by the users in the heterosexual relationship-seeking (e.g.,

109

Chow & Hu, 2013; Rudder, 2014; Tsunokai et al., 2013). In this way, I highlight the white privilege insinuated through his hafu friend's identity and presentations of the body. Through his presentation of the white phenotype in the online dating space, he receives benefits from the system of the U.S. racial hierarchy.

Moreover, this is more than just a matter of his racial/ethnic identity. His cisgender male and heterosexual identity in addition to his ability to present white phenotypes automatically position him at the top of the hierarchy within the dominant structures of whiteness, patriarchy, and cisheteronormativity. Here, I also complicate white privilege in the discourse of hafu identity. As a mixed Japanese like Teru's friend, I share Japan's racial/ethnic identity as hafu. However, Teru's friend and my hafuness are contextually different because I am an Asian/Japanese-looking hafu (i.e., a mix of Chinese and Japanese ethnicities) who do not hold white phenotypes. In this way, when I heard Teru's narrative about his hafu friend and how he has been *successful* in matching and developing relationships in online dating, I could not relate to his hafu friend's dating experiences. Rather, I thought "of course, he must be a good-looking and attractive man because of his white phenotypes. But I'm not."

But simultaneously, I must reflect on my own white privilege as hafu. My white privilege is the ability to *fit into* Japanese culture and society as the dominant white Japanese without challenging my hafu identity or being challenged by myself and others. Teru's friend may have experienced it differently because of Japan's hegemonic and mono-racial/ethnic beliefs which also work as exclusionary ideologies against foreigners, mixed-race/ethnic Japanese (especially ones with Western phenotypes), and ethnic minorities in Japan. Yet, importantly, both Teru's friend and I embody white privilege as cisgender and heterosexual

men in transnational contexts. Therefore, through Teru's narrative and the discourse of hafu identity, I argue that whiteness is not a singular practice and/or embodiment of power. Rather, it is enacted differently depending on the cultural, social, political, and spatial contexts.

In Takumi's case, he shared his perspectives based on his interactions with his female friends and coworkers, as follows:

> Since I'm a Japanese language teacher, I'm surrounded by many female friends in my field and at the workplace, and I have many female Japanese friends too. But based on hearing their experiences, I thought that Japanese women are certainly more popular, I mean, their matching rate is pretty high. It's the difficulty of matching for me. I'm shooting my shots so many times (i.e., swiping right) but like, "is this the only match I can get?" you know? My female friends frequently ask me how I'm doing in online dating and they tell me that they got connected with others and such conversations happen regularly. I did have some matches but not that frequently, you know. So, I understand this will be a comparison to Japanese women, but the moments like this, I feel like Japanese men are less popular or attractive than Japanese women.

Elaborating on his feeling of struggling to match in online dating, his everyday conversations with his female friends and coworkers highlighted the gap in online dating experiences between being Japanese women (as desired) and Japanese men (as undesired). Takumi's perspective illustrates the larger U.S. racial, gender, and sexual politics associated with Asian female bodies. Asian women have historically been highly exoticized, sexualized, and fetishized to be the object of the male gaze (e.g., Chou, 2012; Masequesmay & Metzger,

2009; Shimizu, 2012). As supported by the scholarship, Asian women are the most desired or preferred racial group in the heterosexual online dating space (e.g., Chow & Hu, 2013; Rudder, 2014; Pyke & Johnson, 2003). But simultaneously, Takumi as well as Asian men are still cisgender and heterosexual men, holding heterosexual cismale privileges within the dominant structures of society such as patriarchy and cisheteronormativity. As Asian feminists and queer scholars (e.g., Chen, 2007; Choi, 2020; Eguchi, 2011 & 2015; Espiritu, 1997; Suganuma, 2012) called out the binary framework and thinking of male and female, hyposexualized and hypersexualized, and desired and undesired, I must not forget the pervasiveness of cisheteronormative gaze rooted in Takumi and other interviewees' narratives. Especially, Takumi's narrative assumes the binary framework of male/female and non/heterosexuality which further defines cisheteronormativity, how one is supposed to desire a different gender which does not allow any fluidity and flexibility in sexual/romantic desire (Eguchi, 2011). Takumi's marginality — the feeling of difficulty in matching is confirmed as one of the prominent impressions in his overall experiences of participating in online dating apps by witnessing such gaps between Japanese women and himself. But simultaneously, his narrative revealed the (unconscious) embodiment of cisheteronormativity.

In hearing and conversing with interviewees' experiences of participating in online dating apps, I find that many of them have struggled to match with other people because of the language proficiency in expressing themselves or communicating with others in the apps. Even they came to the U.S. for studying or working, using English as the primary language in their academic/professional life in the U.S. and some of them have lived in the U.S. for

nearly or over 10 years, language plays an important role in their online dating experiences. For example, Teru who has been living in the U.S. for over 13 years expressed, as follows:

> There were so many times I've felt the difficulty. You know, for English expressions too, depending on the choice of words to describe the same meaning, hmm, how do I say, that determines how much you are clever or you will be regarded as very childish. Even something is as simple as selecting one word, you can be thought to be a low-level human being. Because I often care about such things, one of the barriers I feel is the difficulty of the English language. In this aspect, there is a sense of security with Asian women because I feel like I have the same level of English proficiency, so I don't have to engage in dialogue with high-level English. I worry about it a lot when I chat with Caucasian women.

As described in his concerns of being thought to be *childish* or *low-level human being*, language connects to the intelligibility as a human being and social capital. Moreover, his narrative illuminates how language is associated with certain racial, gender, and sexual identity and power dynamics. Assuming that Caucasian women are native speakers of English, his concerns about his language proficiency and fear of being thought to be a *low-level human being* denote the superiority of the White race and the English language. In contrast, he feels a sense of security when communicating with Asian women because he thinks that they have a lower-level English proficiency compared to Caucasian women. Here, I find his insecurity does not only come from the racial hierarchy. It is also the insecurity of maintaining his masculinity and heterosexuality in relation to women in online dating apps. For example, in the construction of Japan's adult manhood, maturity in terms of economic stability and intelligibility is a key aspect of maintaining one's heterosexual masculinity

113

(Cook, 2013). He fears being considered as *childish* because this expression denotes the immature, underdeveloped, and dependent quality in opposition to what he thinks adult manhood is supposed to look like. Moreover, as I was having conversations with him, I observed that the way he speaks is masculine-presenting through his tone of voice and demeanor. On the note of the way interviewees speak, Kuma expressed that he was often told by others that he speaks *too soft*, hence, not masculine enough. In this vein, language and the performance of speaking are closely connected to gender and sexual identity. Thus, racial, gender, and sexual implications and power dynamics of language are insinuated through Teru's narrative.

Specifically, he said that he has to *ki wo tsukau* (気を遣う) when chatting or exchanging text messages with Caucasian women on the apps. While I translated *ki wo tsukau* as *worry* in his narrative above, it is a culturally specific Japanese expression that cannot be translated into English in a simple manner. It literally means "to use *ki* (気 [mind]) toward someone," implying the act of paying attention to someone and being careful, considerate, thoughtful, and polite so that you will not cause any trouble for them. In Teru's interactions with Caucasian women, he is compelled to *ki wo tsukau* for them because there is a level of power associated with the language, race, gender, and sexuality affecting his behavior.

In particular, while interviewees did not specify in the interview processes, the English language they are referring to is so-called *Standard American English* (SAE) which is "a codeword for 'white' English with deeply embedded assumptions about intelligence, knowledge, truth, credibility, and authority" (Sekimoto & Brown, 2016, p. 106; see also, hooks, 1994). Since the Meiji restoration in 1868, English language education was

implemented in Japan to catch up with the Western countries and modernization. After the defeat in WWII, the Japanese government started to strengthen English language education in middle/high schools as a part of the national project of educating global citizens. Through the process of internationalization/Westernization, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology constituted English language education as a required curriculum for primary and secondary education in 2011 (Seargeant, 2011). On the note of whiteness in Japan's English language education system, Simmons and Chen (2017) asserted that the institution creates a false conception of *native speaker* of the English language to be White male Americans because it supports the globalized White supremacy (see also, Allen, 2001; Leonardo, 2002). Growing up in such a society and education system, interviewees have been taught *white* English to be the ideal or normal and appropriate tool to communicate in the global society (Sekimoto & Brown, 2016). Simultaneously, this *white* English (SAE) in this context is a gendered and sexual discourse because it is usually taught (and preferred to be taught) by white Western men in Japanese education (Appleby, 2014). Appleby (2014) examined that the predominance of white Western men as SAE teachers in Japanese higher education reinforces the hegemonic masculinity and cisheteronormativity through idealizing them as "a 'normal' family man" (p. 789) who is academically successful and attractive to female students.

Takumi who has been living in the U.S. since 2015 expressed the meaning of presenting his Japanese identity in the online dating profile, as follows:

I did think that expressing I'm Japanese means you are disclosing you speak English as a second language. So, I wondered how that would impact the *likes* I can get from

other people but I ended up writing about it in my profile, so when I receive *likes*, they were usually interested in Japan [emphasis added].

In addition to intentionally presenting his Japanese identity in the bio or profile, Takumi is concerned about disclosing that he is Japanese in his profile because that automatically implies he is an ESL speaker. Hearing his English, I do not think he has a heavy accent when he speaks English, and he is a well-educated English speaker with an undergraduate education background in the English language. Thus, he is capable of fluently speaking English. However, his concern is the potential impact of getting *likes* based on the assumed English proficiency as an ESL speaker. This is another example of how the dominance of whiteness affects Japanese men's self-perceptions and interactions with others on the apps. In his case, whiteness prompts him to position himself (ESL speaker) as inferior to native English speakers (Amos & Rehorst, 2018). But simultaneously, Takumi also embodies the privilege of whiteness as a cismale and heterosexual who has a well-educated background in SAE. In this vein, Takumi's narrative associated with language ability and whiteness illuminates his positionality within the spectrum of privileges and disadvantages.

Takumi also shared the difficulty of creating the profile for some apps that he has used before, as follows:

I think it was OkCupid, creating the profile was kind of a hardship, I mean tiresome. You know, you have to write a lot. They make me write something to present my personality stuff. That process felt tiresome. But I guess, for native English speakers, they look at whether I have a good sense or how I will be a good match for them based on that writing part. For me, it was hard … I ended up giving up because [creating] the profile page took me forever and I could never complete it. Also, I

don't have the input or data on how people think certain sentences are attractive and write them to people of the opposite sex. Because I didn't have the stock of how to write attractively, I had a hard time and felt difficulty presenting myself. […] I don't have the savings of communication with the purpose of relationship-seeking in English. So, I continue to struggle with it. Even with the small talk, I do put my effort to deepen the conversations but they rarely go deeper. Then, both of us get tiresome and eventually stop contacting each other.

For Takumi, his struggle comes from his lack of knowing the *natural* or *accepted* writing styles that may attract U.S.-based female users on the apps. He also articulated his lack of experience communicating with people for the purpose of relationship-seeking in the U.S. In this context, cisheteronormativity plays a significant role in developing relationships through a *natural* or *accepted* act of speech. For example, he is concerned about the ways to present himself in writing and texting that can attract female users on the apps. In his narrative, the ideas of sex, sexuality, and gender are constructed by the binary framework such as men/women, heterosexual or not, and male/female with an underlining assumption of its normative sexual/romantic desire. Moreover, his aspiration to text or speak *attractively* with female users as a male insinuates the cisheteronormative practice and system of gender and sexuality. But simultaneously, his desire to develop romantic and heterosexual relationships cannot be attained because his matches usually break off contact.

Similarly, Yusuke who has also been living in the U.S. since 2016 had trouble writing his profile. He said, "Sometimes the [online dating profile] prompts are very culturally specific, and I wonder how I can interpret and write it. That itself is like the practice within the community, so I feel I cannot go into the space." Both Takumi and Yusuke felt isolated

when they were participating in online dating because of the difficulties that they have experienced in crafting their online dating profile in English. This sense of isolation is an important finding because it denotes their negotiation of identities and belonging in the online dating space. As cisgender heterosexual men, they belong to the dominant group in terms of their gender and sexuality. But simultaneously, their language ability and presentation are often racialized and sinuated as inferior to Western ideals and standards of speech. Based on their narratives, they struggled to perform or interpret what would be socially accepted or appropriate communication in order to be a part of the online dating space. Thus, their experiences and intersecting politics of race, gender, and sexuality illuminate how they navigate their relationship-seeking in online dating within the spectrum of privileged and disadvantaged positionalities.

Relating to Takumi's educational background, it is important to note that all interviewees except Kuma (Joe, Kouki, Matt, Takumi, Teru, and Yusuke) have earned graduate degrees (e.g., master's and/or doctoral) in the U.S. Moreover, Takumi and Yusuke's undergraduate degree/major was related to the field of English language in Japan's one of the prestigious private universities. Thus, they are well-educated Japanese men who decided to study abroad and live in the U.S. This means, their level of English proficiency is a full professional working proficiency that they are able to use the English language fluently and accurately for effectively having conversations in and across everyday and academic contexts. Here, I also critically reflect on my own privilege associated with their backgrounds. Similar to Takumi and Yusuke, I have also graduated with an undergraduate degree in the English language and moved to the U.S. for pursuing graduate degrees. My ability to use English with a full professional working proficiency as a tool in higher

education is a privilege that shows my social capital and global mobility. Connecting with their experiences, this is a meaningful finding that although they are proficient enough to live and work in English, they still feel challenges and difficulties using English as a tool to communicate and relate to others in cultivating romantic/sexual relationships in online dating contexts. In this vein, their ability to speak English elucidates the spectrum of privileges and disadvantages for the relationship-seeking in the online dating space. As Takumi said, "It's my ideal if I can speak native-like English so that I can approach women more easily. But in reality, I'll never be able to be confident in my life because it's impossible to become a native speaker." Here, I highlight again that cisheteronormativity is communicated through his cisgender heterosexual assumption of relationship-seeking. Moreover, gendered *native-like English* (SAE) is idealized for building effective relationships which is also presented as an impossible ability for ESL speakers. Thus, their narratives regarding the English language elucidate the pervasiveness of the dominant structures of power such as whiteness, racial hierarchy, and hegemonic systems of gender and sexuality. Their use of English reveals the intersecting discourses of race, gender, sexuality, and class and how they affect their positionalities within the spectrum of privilege and disadvantage in the online dating space.

Here, their experiences illuminate how language works as the materiality of social capital (Clark, 2006). Social capital is broadly defined as "The networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively" (Oxford University Press, 2021). As Takumi, Teru, and Yusuke's narratives demonstrate, language is a shared resource and value that can build functional social networks and relationships among people which enable them to live and work effectively. While they shared their feelings of struggling to use English as a primary communication

tool, it does not mean that they are lacking social capital. Rather, having a full professional working proficiency and advanced degrees in the U.S. insinuate their capacity, mobility, and economic stability to live and work in the global society (Sekimoto, 2014). This is an embodiment of global capitalism — how language and identity are historically commodified in the global society, and global English denotes the power of the nation-state (Ives, 2015). My interviewees' ability to use English already insinuates the materiality of global capitalism that empowers them to move across transnational space through the consumption of global language. Thus, their experiences of seeking romantic/sexual relationships further indicate the layer of class affecting their everyday contexts, an ability to travel internationally, study abroad, and work (i.e., financial stability and global mobility).

Another important factor that emerged from interviewees' narratives was the geographical location when using the apps. While interviewees' overall impression of their participation in online dating was the struggling experience to match with other people, some of them shared that they could actually match under certain circumstances. For example, Takumi and Yusuke had used Pairs, a Japan-born online dating app that consists of mostly Japanese users. When using this app, they had a relatively better experience because they felt Pairs was much easier to match than other U.S.-based dating apps such as Bumble, Match.com, and Tinder. However, even they were able to match with others in Pairs, they still struggled to develop relationships. Yusuke shared his online dating experience when he was living in Hawai'i before moving to the U.S. mainland, as follows:

> In Hawai'i, I could match quite often. There was one time I thought it was going well
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> with a girl who had a similar background. She was *Nikkei* (日系), something like
>
> around the third generation, so I felt it was easy to open up to her. But the relationship

120

didn't last long because, in the U.S., people are pretty open about the relationship. I

kind of had a strong image of Japan's *kokuhaku* (告白) and being in a relationship

officially. So, we got into disagreements when she told me she saw her ex.

*Nikkei* means Japanese emigrants or descendants who are living abroad as citizens of other

countries. It generally refers to those people of Japanese ancestry who are not citizens of

Japan. It is not surprising that he felt that he could easily match when he was using the app in

Hawai'i where there is a large population of Japanese immigrants and Japanese/American

communities.

His experience of being able to find the match who was *Sansei* (三世 [literally, third

generation]) and the relationship with the land of Hawai'i illuminate the historical context of

Japan's imperial power. The first Japanese immigrants entered the kingdom of Hawai'i in

1868 (Azuma, 2005) and today, approximately 14% of the population consists of Japanese

ancestry in Hawai'i. In the late 19th century, Japanese immigrants came to Hawai'i for

greater financial opportunities. Specifically, Japanese men were agricultural workers, and

later, Japanese women arrived as *picture brides*. With Japan's national project of

internationalization/Westernization, Japanese immigrants in Hawai'i were what Koikari

(2010) calls an indispensable part of the "Japanese imperial conquest abroad" (p. 551). This

historical trajectory of Japanese immigrants and diaspora in the U.S. is imperative in

unpacking the positionality and racialization of Japanese identity. Specifically, the historical

context of *Nisei* (二世 [literally, second generation]) and Asian Americans as *forever*

*foreigners* and *honorary whites* (e.g., Tuan, 1998) denotes nuanced and contradicting identity

formation in U.S. racialization and racial hierarchy.

As Azuma (2009) highlighted, both Japaneseness and whiteness are at play in situating Japanese American identity as the oppressed and oppressor at the same time. In Japan, *Nisei* are considered as foreigners or not fully Japanese but positioned as superior to native Japanese because of their nationality and the U.S. global hegemony. In the U.S., they are positioned as superior to other Asian ethnic communities and minority groups of people but discriminated against by the white hegemony. After the war, *Nisei* gradually improved their sociocultural positionality as Japanese Americans in the U.S. by taking part in producing literary works, creating arts, and gaining visibility in popular culture. Consequently, in today's U.S. dominant discourses, Japanese Americans are perceived as the case of *successful assimilation* (Kikumura-Yano, 2002). Thus, Yusuke's experience of feeling easier to match in Hawai'i illuminates the relationships between Japanese identity and the land of Hawai'i – particularly, how *Nisei* played a significant role in establishing the current positionality of Japanese/Americans, and also carries how the identity formation of Japanese/American have been assimilated and accepted in the U.S. context.

Furthermore, Yusuke's explanation of *kokuhaku* (告白) illustrates Japan's culturally specific and gendered process of developing romantic relationships. *Kokuhaku* literally means *confession* (without religious implications). In romantic contexts, it is an act to confess one's feelings for another. As he described, in Japanese everyday practices, the romantic relationship or even dating process would *officially* start after the act of *kokuhaku.* In this way, *kokuhaku* is a declaration of or asking for a commitment to the relationship and draws a clear line between a person is in a relationship or not (Farrer et al., 2008). Because there is no clear-cut line between stages of dating and being in a relationship in the U.S., Yusuke experienced a moment of disagreement with his partner about how a romantic

relationship is supposed to be. In particular, he had difficulty defining the relationship without *kokuhaku*. This is where the differences of intercultural interpersonal communication in romantic contexts affected Yusuke's online dating experiences. More importantly, *kokuhaku* is a gendered process of relationship-building in the Japanese context. It is typically perceived as a male role practice because it involves the risk of rejection and female Japanese usually expect to receive this act of *kokuhaku* from male partners (Farrer et al., 2008; Kuribayashi, 2002). Reflecting on my previous romantic relationships in Japan, I remember the act of *kokuhaku* is socially expected even in male-to-male conversations among friends like "好きなら何で告白しないの？ (Why don't you *kokuhaku* if you like her?)" This gender role exemplifies the practice of hegemonic masculinity which situates men in control and women as dependent on men for defining heterosexual romantic relationships. Thus, the act of *kokuhaku* also reveals the cisheteronormative assumptions and practices of binary thinking of gender and sexuality in romantic contexts. In this vein, Japan's gender norms and cisheteronormativity are communicated through the act of *kokuhaku.* Thus, Yusuke's narrative revealed how his expression is culturally and socially shaped while romantic feelings can be widely experienced regardless of cultural differences.

> Takumi shared his experience of being able to match with others on Pairs, as follows:
> I thought there is a huge difference between Japanese men finding matches in the U.S. and Japanese men matching with Japanese women in Japan. You know, different hurdles and matching rates will be also different. So, when I was using Pairs, potential partners from the matches were usually living in California and Hawai'i, so I can't see them in-person in the first place. Above all, finding potential partners within the range I can see in-person itself is hard and it's even harder on Tinder.

Matching with my own experiences of facing difficulty when using Pairs, Takumi also experienced a similar dynamic of frustration after being able to match in Pairs. In addition to Hawai'i, he referred to California as another location where he could find matches in Pairs. Like Hawai'i, California is where Chinese and Japanese immigrants first arrived in the U.S. and one of the largest states consisting of Japanese and Asian/American communities. Similar to Yusuke's case, Takumi's experience of being able to match with people from California and Hawai'i insinuates how he was accepted as a potential romantic/sexual partner. These narratives exemplified how space/place associated with particular historical contexts and identity formations play an important role in their online dating experiences. I relate to their struggling experiences in terms of the geographical barriers/restrictions based on my participation in the apps such as Pairs, Tinder, and Bumble. When I was using Pairs, I could match with other users from California and Hawai'i. In this way, I felt I was desirable or attractive to the potential matches because I could match with other users. However, I eventually felt the conversations with the matches were meaningless because it seemed unrealistic for me to travel to California and Hawai'i and see them in person. Thus, Takumi and Yusuke's experiences highlight the disconnection between the online dating space and the physical dating space in limiting the possibility of relationship-building.

In addition to their narratives about the struggles of getting matches, Matt further articulated the racialized discourse of Asian ethnicity and desirability in online dating, as follows:

Yeah, it [online dating] is not easy for Asian men, I think. Unless you go to more like Japanese-only or Korean-only dating sites, then I think it's a different case. But if you just go to general apps like Match.com or Tinder, sometimes I think it's very difficult

124

for Asian men. It's just my own perception, but the Caucasian guys and some other

American people, they are a lot taller than you, they have stronger bodies, and some

look like models, so. You feel like you can't compete with that you know? And yeah,

I have more success in the space like East Meet East site than general Tinder or

Match.com, for sure.

Here, his articulation demonstrates his experiences of living in the U.S. as an Asian man and

signifies the racializing discourse of Asian men in the online dating space. Hence, his

personal experience reflects the materiality of racial hierarchy in everyday contexts. East

Meet East (EME Hive) is an online dating site/app exclusively targeted toward Asian singles

looking for Asian partners. Having used the apps such as EME Hive, Tinder, and Match.com

before, he experienced that he was more *successful* in EME Hive than Tinder and Match.com

which are not exclusive to Asian-to-Asian dating. In this context, *successful* means the ability

to be able to match and develop romantic/sexual relationships, achieving his personal goal of

using the apps which was to find partners for long-term relationships. Therefore, his

racialized narrative reveals his feeling of being undesired in the apps unless the apps are

designed for people who exclusively want to date Asian men. This narrative also coincides

with the literature about Asian men being the least desired in online dating contexts (e.g.,

Chow & Hu, 2013; Rudder, 2014).

Moreover, he referred to the superiority of Caucasians and the U.S. American men

that he feels he cannot compete with the associated aesthetics of white physical attributes. He

explained the Caucasian and the U.S. American men's physicality as taller, stronger, and

model-type and situated such characteristics as superior to his Japanese/Asian body. In this

vein, Matt's articulation of the Caucasian and the U.S. American men's body denotes the

notion of hegemonic masculinity which positions white, tall, physically strong male as the ideal quality of men (Chou, 2012; Iwamoto & Liu, 2009). This superior or ideal image of men communicates how the U.S. hegemonic masculinity affects Matt's online dating experiences in terms of his feeling of being un/desired when participating in EME Hive, Tinder, and Match.com. Simultaneously, this hegemonic masculinity insinuates the role of cisheteronormativity in Matt's narrative of how he is drawn to the quality of being masculine and attractive (e.g., taller and model-looking) in heterosexual desire. His explanation of masculinity is always in opposition to femininity and the binary framework of men/women and heterosexual/non-heterosexual. Elaborating on the overall experiences of feeling struggles to match in online dating, the next sections specifically focus on the ideal image of men and masculinity that emerged from Japanese men's narratives.

### White Masculine Idealism

Closely related to interviewees' overall impression of feeling difficulty and challenges participating in online dating in the U.S., I find the dominant discourses of masculinity have a significant impact on their understanding and performance of being a cisgender man. Specifically, their ideas of *otoko rashisa* (男らしさ [literally, masculinity]) reifies whiteness, U.S. hegemonic masculinity, cisheteronormativity, and patriarchy through their affect and everyday interactions with people around them.

Importantly, all of the interviewees told me that they do not feel masculine enough based on their experiences of having lived in the U.S. and participated in online dating.

Teru strongly expressed, as follows:

I've felt that I'm not masculine enough so many times. So, I need to get myself together to lose weight in a healthy way and build more muscles. Also, I really think

that I need to be better off financially. For example, if my ideal self is 100, my self-

evaluation is 20 or 30, honestly.

Yusuke also reflected, as follows:

Yeah, I don't think I'm masculine. I don't post *maccho* (マッチョ) photos, I'm not

*maccho* after all. Thinking about physicality and *okoto rashisa*, it's difficult. But it's

nice to have a healthy body to some extent and a six-pack, you know. It doesn't have

to be like bodybuilders, but I want to be more muscular. Right now, I think I'm

slacky.

A Japanese term for *maccho* generally refers to a masculine body type. Both of them

articulated their desire to have a healthy body and build more muscles through the feeling of

not being masculine enough. Moreover, Teru's self-evaluation and Yusuke's self-explanation

of being *slacky* imply the self-blaming of the current state of their bodies. In this vein, their

narratives reveal their sense of inferiority in opposition to the muscular body as the ideal

masculinity. Here, I uncover the role of cisheteronormativity that affects their self-perception

of bodies and masculinity within the hegemonic masculinity discourse. Here, their narratives

should be read with nuances and contradictions because while they feel their masculinity is

inferior to hegemonic masculinity, their cismale and heterosexual identities already denote

privileged positionality as *straight men* engaging with heterosexual relationship-building.

Except for Joe, he considers himself as relatively masculine as he has been training in

the military. However, he felt he is not masculine enough because he had hesitation

presenting his masculine body through profile pictures on online dating apps. He explained,

as follows:

I felt I was lacking masculinity because I didn't post pictures of my muscular body. There are many [U.S. American] people showing off their bodies like that. I don't know what exactly the purpose is, but I think they are showing off their *otoko rashisa*. […] If you do that in Japan, I think you might turn women off with such pictures. But in the U.S., I thought presenting your masculinity like that is significant because it's the norm.

Different from other interviewees who feel they are not masculine enough because of the lack of physical strength and muscles, Joe has the physicality that he can demonstrate in the apps. But he had issues with the self-presentation of masculinity in U.S. online dating. He also imagined that such pictures will not be well-received by Japanese women and said showing off the muscular body like that is *kimochi warui* (気持ち悪い [literally, weird, creepy, and sickening]). As I listened to Joe's narratives, I could see his cisheteronormative presentation of masculinity to be *well-received* by Japanese women. Simultaneously, his feeling of the lack of masculinity exemplifies the materiality of hegemonic masculinity affecting his self-presentation in online dating.

Matt shared his narrative that is related to the online dating context, as follows:

Definitely, many times [I've felt that I'm not masculine enough]. I'm not very tall, five, six, so. Yeah, I'm always the short one. And so many times I wished I was taller, many times. I wished I was bigger? Yeah. This is something that I can't change so I have to accept who I am and just be the best I can be. But there are many times I do feel inferior. And I go online dating sites too, when you write your height and weight. And just writing my true height, I'm gonna automatically get excluded by many women, I think, because of the height. So, that was hard, but I didn't want to lie and

put different heights in there … so, I try to stay true to myself. But a preference of the range for height in the U.S. is much higher than in Japan. Like in Japan, not women are as tall as the ones in the U.S. so they're more open to someone shorter. But in the U.S., there are so many tall people here, so, you'll get used to really tall people. So, in the U.S., the desired range of height is higher, I think.

In his narrative, he frequently mentioned height as an important factor in determining masculinity. Especially, he thinks that he will automatically be excluded from other women's preferences by disclosing his *short* height in his online dating profile. This is connected to how he struggled with self-presenting and getting matches in online dating apps as well. For example, some online dating apps are designed with the function of checkboxes and/or ranges for the users to solidify their preferences and narrow down the potential matches. Matt referred to this point that he will be *automatically excluded* by female users based on their preferred *range* of height. Takumi also talked about the significance of height in the online dating market, as follows:

Height, I personally don't care about women's height, but I know some women do care about men's height. Yeah, I'm not in a tall category at all, so I feel it's a disadvantage. I sometimes think I shouldn't make it public in the profile. I want to date people who don't care about it, but I don't know, it might be the fact that there are more women who prefer taller men than shorter, so.

Like Matt's explanation about the height, Takumi expressed that disclosing his height in the profile is a disadvantage for getting matches in online dating because he understands that women tend to prefer taller men in developing romantic/sexual relationships. Here, both Matt and Takumi's narratives denote cisheteronormativity. Specifically, height is associated as a

significant factor in their masculinity through the female gaze. In this context, their narratives assume the binary frameworks of gender (e.g., cismale and cisfemale) and sexuality (e.g., heterosexual and non-heterosexual) as normative and fixed. In addition to the height, Takumi also mentioned that sometimes he wonders whether he should disclose his income in the profile. His concern illuminates how socioeconomic status is a key factor in the maintenance of his masculinity in the online dating context. This leads to the cisheteronormative ideologies and traditional gender norms that men should be financially stable enough to provide for women and family. Thus, Takumi's concern signifies that class is another important layer in constituting hegemonic masculinity and cisheteronormativity. Here, I only introduced Matt and Takumi's narratives, but other interviewees expressed their desire to be a taller man and aspiration for higher socioeconomic status to be *successful* in online dating based on their ideal image of masculinity.

Further unpacking their idea of *otoko rashisa*, some interviewees expressed the associated qualities, values, or characteristics of being a man or masculine. Kouki shared his perspectives, as follows:

To me, masculinity is like being husky, good at all sports, and if I put it in the Japanese way, it's like *teishu kanpaku* (亭主関白). Something like men who lead but are selfish. You know, Japan is a patriarchal society. Having grown up within that kind of society, I have an image of male superiority if I think about masculinity.

Matt similarly articulated, as follows:

Typical American society, I would say masculinity is like much bigger than me, I think. I think Japanese men are a little bit more like not so much of taking charge and "you come with me" type, you know. It's more adjusted to your partner and "go

130

together" kind of type so I think those are differences. But many people who are in

the U.S., I think, from TV, friends, school, sports, and things like that, when they

think of like, a manly man, I think it's more like a bigger guy with big muscle. You

know, it's very stereotypical, like playing football or something. Driving a big truck

or something.

Both of them mentioned playing sports as one of the characteristics of masculinity. Matt's

specific reference to football illuminates socially structured masculinity that is also related to

its racial and class discourses. For example, Foley (1990) examined the underlining hierarchy

of race, gender, and class through football and asserted that it is "a popular cultural practice

deeply implicated in the reproduction of the local ruling class of white males, hence class,

patriarchal, and racial forms of dominance" (p. 133). In navigating himself within the U.S.

society and the idea of masculinity, Matt feels Japanese men do not follow the traits of

masculinity perceived in the U.S. This is also connected to why he feels he is not masculine

enough. Moreover, Kouki's reference to *being good at all sports* as masculinity insinuates

male dominance and imbalanced gender relations. *Being good at all sports* is attached to

masculinity based on men's ability to demonstrate their strength and superiority – men can

run faster, jump higher, lift heavier weights, and throw farther (e.g., Anderson, 1999). Matt

understands such images are *stereotypical*; however, those images continue to inform or

shape what does masculinity supposed to look like (i.e., hegemonic masculinity) (Chou,

2012; Iwamoto & Liu, 2009). Simultaneously, I assert that their understandings of men and

masculinity continuously underscore the cisheteronormative and binary assumptions in

opposition to women and femininity in heterosexual relationships.

In Kouki's explanation, he not only did mention the physicality of *being husky* and *good at all sports* but also referred to mentality, social structure, and power dynamics based on his experiences growing up in Japan. *Teishu kanpaku* is a Japanese term generally used in the family context. *Teishu* (亭主) literally means the master/head of the house/family and *kanpaku* (関白) means a chief advisor position for the emperor in Japanese history from the Heian to Edo period (884-1868). Because *kanpaku* was practically the highest position other than the emperor, it is often used to signify a person who rules or is in charge of something. Mashing up *teishu* with *kanpaku* means a husband who dominates or rules the household. By introducing this concept, Kouki made a connection to how Japan has been a patriarchal society and male superiority is associated with an idea of masculinity. Moreover, this concept of *teishu kanpaku* already insinuates cisheteronormativity that ideas of marriage, gender norms, and family are taken for granted.

Historically, the notion of *teishu kanpaku,* as well as the social construction of gender ideology, originates from the ancient Chinese belief system of Confucianism and is widely populated across Asian countries after the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220). Confucianism had deeply influenced the construction of gender ideologies because one of the core beliefs of Confucianism is the teaching of defining/differentiating the space/place: the public space to be occupied by men and the domestic space to be occupied by women (Taga, 2005). Simultaneously, the core beliefs are cisheteronormative. Moreover, the male domination and the virtue of female subordination are firmly communicated. For example, one of the traditional textbooks of Confucianism, *Li-ji* (礼记 [often translated as the Book of Rites]) teaches that "the women must practice the art of 'following' – following her father as a daughter, following her husband as a wife, and following her son as a mother" (Taga, 2005,

p. 130). Here, the traditional values of family and kinship denote the cisheteronormative nature of Confucianism. While Confucianism is treated as one of the classical literature and is not explicitly practiced in today's Japan, the values of Confucianism, cisheteronormativity and traditional systems of family, gender, and sexuality are deep-rooted in the contemporary romantic/family relationship-building. Thus, as I was listening to my interviewees, I question how their ideas of masculinity and heterosexuality are narrated as fixed identity categories and stabilized through the binary frameworks of gender and sexuality.

Teru also shared his understanding of masculinity, as follows:

Physically speaking, being able to risk his life to protect women if something happens. For other aspects, having no difficulty financially supporting a wife, family, and children. Also, supporting the aspect of physical strengths. I want to do a round-the-world trip with a child in the future. At the time, being able to walk around and travel together, that's more like fatherhood than being masculine, but yeah. In short, like men in the Showa period, *senaka de kataru* (背中で語る). I'm very conscious of these three things. The reason why I became conscious about it is through the conversations and meeting with a Hong Kong girl [in online dating]. If I didn't do Facebook's online dating app, I honestly wouldn't have thought about it this strongly.

*Senaka de kataru* is a Japanese expression that is difficult to translate into English. The literal translation can be telling/speaking (*kataru*) by one's back (*senaka*). It means communicating an attitude/message to others by just showing one's back without any words. In popular discourse, this expression is often coupled with a male gender role, the quality of being a man or father that leads the family and educates their children. Most importantly, Teru's idea of masculinity is constructed by cisheteronormative ideologies of romantic/family

133

relationships and ideal/normative assumptions such as getting married, starting a family, practicing fatherhood, and having a child. In this vein, discourses of sexuality, the heterosexual norm of marriage and reproduction are interconnected to his view of masculinity as taken for granted ideas and practices. Financially supporting and physically protecting women and family also exemplifies the materiality of cisheteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity informing Teru's understanding and performance of masculinity and heterosexuality. Subsequently, participating in the online dating app became an opportunity for him to further reinforce such ideas of masculinity and cisheteronormative assumptions. In this vein, his narrative showcases the impossibility of destabilizing the centricity of cisheteronormativity which is consistently affirmed through online dating experiences.

Like Teru's understanding of masculinity, Matt also expressed that the act of financially, physically, or mentally providing for the family is a key aspect of masculinity, as follows:

If you have a family, providing for your family is very important, I think. Nowadays it's different … Women work and it's not like the husband has to be the one always providing. But for a man's confidence I think, that's a pretty big role, I think. You are working and providing or at least helping your family with financial things. When winning a crisis, you take charge and do the best you can. You don't stay back and wait for people to help you. You try to fix that situation or find a way and ask for help. That's definitely a key.

While Matt recognized that men providing for the family is a traditional way of thinking about family and gender roles and such quality of masculinity has been shifting, he still understands financially supporting and protecting the family are prominent values for men to

be confident. Importantly, this financial ability from gender discourses is associated with

class issues that class plays a crucial role in maintaining cisgender male identity. In fact,

Japan's Cabinet Office legislated the Basic Act for Gender Equal Society to promote gender

equality in 1999. However, as of 2021, Japan ranked 120 out of 156 countries in the Global

Gender Gap Report 2021 published by the World Economic Forum (World Economic

Forum, 2021). Especially, the categories of economics and politics received notably lower

scores compared to other countries. This is noticeably evident in Japan's gender wage gap.

Thus, Matt's narrative embodies the materiality of the current situation of Japan's gender

inequality – he acknowledges the changes of more women participating in the workplace

nowadays, but at the same time, gender roles are valued to secure the centrality of

masculinity. Moreover, class is another prominent factor in the maintenance of masculinity

and the imbalanced gender system. Here, I once again assert the pervasiveness of

cisheteronormativity communicated through his narrative such as cisgender heterosexual

underlining, the role of the husband, physically and financially supporting the family, and

taking the lead for the family.

Some interviewees' responses explicitly highlighted how their understandings of

masculinity are shaped by or shaping the U.S. hegemonic masculinity when they were

describing their images of the ideal man. Teru explained, as follows:

I have an ultimate ideal. For Caucasians, it's Brad Pitt. Like a picture of him wearing

a T-shirt or unbuttoned shirt and showing his six-pack in dim light so that you can see

the shadow of it. For the Japanese, it's Shinji Takeda (武田真治) who's doing

"Muscles for All!" (a workout TV program by Japan Broadcasting Corporation

[NHK]). He's muscle is remarkable too. It's my ultimate ideal though … they are

handsome that even men would think so and more attractive from a women's

standpoint.

Similarly, Kouki also shared that Brad Pitt is his image of the ideal man. Here, their specific

references to Brad Pitt who is a white, cisgender male, heterosexual, and wealthy figure as

the ideal image elucidate dominant power dynamics of cisheteronormativity and hegemonic

masculinity intersecting with race, gender, sexuality, and class. Brad Pitt appeared on the

cover of Sexiest Man Alive twice in 1995 and 2000. Given the trend of who gets to be

*People's* annual covers for Sexiest Man Alive (Malone, 2020), it is not surprising. He is also

one of four people to appear on the cover twice in the magazine's history. The other three

people are also white, cisgender male, heterosexual, and wealthy celebrities (i.e., George

Clooney, Johnny Depp, and Richard Gere) (Men who've won Sexiest Man Alive honours

twice, n.d.). Here, I also critically reflect on my perception of masculine idealism. It is

certainly uncomfortable to admit but I do think Brad Pitt as well as other celebrities who are

white, cisgender male, and heterosexual are often attractive, stylish, and model-type figures.

As I could relate to my interviewees' narratives of their ideal image of a man, I also

challenge how the white masculine idealism is culturally and socially embedded in my views

of masculinity. Thus, I critique white masculine idealism; but simultaneously, I realize that I

am also a part of the maintenance of power structures as I engage with interviewees'

narratives, hegemonic masculinity, and cisheteronormativity.

Their articulations of Brad Pitt as the ideal man signify whiteness, hegemonic

masculinity, and cisheteronormativity do not exist only within the U.S. social and cultural

contexts. With their experiences of growing up in Japan and later moving to the U.S. for

study and work, whiteness, hegemonic masculinity, and cisheteronormativity travel across

the border and persist as dominant ideologies (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). As Dutta (2020) reminded us, "Whiteness travels. Its mobility, from the metropoles in the North to the peripheries of the South, underlies the hegemonic structures propelling neoliberal expansionism" (p. 228). Specifically, Japan's internationalization/Westernization during the Meiji era and accelerated globalization after WWII strengthened Japan's desire to be the hegemony of Asia and the superiority of the West which was "constructed as a normative interlocutor in the Japanese imagination. The particularity of Japan [was] always thought out in reference to the generality or universality of the West" (Satsuka, 2009, p. 71). Thus, the aspiration to the West and the U.S. is sociohistorically and culturally embedded in Japan in a variety of everyday contexts such as politics, economics, media, education, business, family, and more (Toyosaki & Eguchi, 2017).

But simultaneously, I find another layer of masculinity in Teru's juxtaposition of Brad Pitt and Shinji Takeda. Shinji Takeda is a Japanese *talento* (タレント [celebrity figures in media and popular culture]) and actor who is also known as a skilled saxophone player. In the 1990s, Takeda appeared on fashion magazine covers as an icon for *femio* (フェミ男) which indicates men wearing make-up, dress, and posing as feminine. *Femi* (フェミ) is short for feminine and *o* (男) means men. They are relatively short, slender, and metrosexual. As this term literally communicates, they usually incorporate feminine fashion styles that have been considered as exclusively for women. In one of the women's magazine headlines, he was featured as "新タイプの男の子　武田真治のつくり方 (A new type of boy: How to make Shinji Takeda)" (Ogawa, 2018, p. 51). Another women's magazine featured *femio* models wearing feminine clothes which was headlined as "ユニセックスが定番。 (Unisex

137

is the new standard.)" (Ogawa, 2018, p. 53). These media images of metrosexual men are completely different from the traditional representations of masculinity which highlight men's physical strength and power. But simultaneously, they are still cismale and heterosexual men who receive benefits from the dominant structures of society.

While the trend of *femio* itself had disappeared around 1994, Ogawa (2018) argued *femio* is a significant phenomenon that became the pioneer for constructing current trends such as *soushokukei danshi* (草食系男子 [herbivorous boy]) and *genda-less danshi* (ジェンダーレス男子 [gender-less boy]) in today's Japan. A *soushokukei danshi* is often passive or less assertive to romantic/sexual relationships and a *genda-less danshi* prioritizes the value of fashion with romantic/sexual partners. These examples demonstrate that Japanese media in the 1990s emphasized a *new standard* for men and established the foundation of untraditional, Japanese masculinity. While Shinji Takeda does not brand himself as *femio* in the current popular media scenes, he is now well-known as *hoso maccho* (細マッチョ [literally, slim macho]), meaning he is masculine but slim (not too overly *macho*) at the same time.

In relation to the western hegemonic ideology of masculinity, Pochyla (2012) stressed that *hoso maccho* emerged as an example of adjusting Japan's local standard of masculinity (Pochyla, 2012). This *hoso maccho* figure is often described as the ideal, healthy, and attractive shape of Japanese men (Kodaka, 2020). Thus, Teru's ideal masculinity (i.e., Brad Pitt and Shinji Takeda) elucidates how western/U.S. hegemonic masculinity is persistent in constituting Japanese men's ideal masculinity. Simultaneously, his narrative showcased Japanese masculinity is a localized form of hegemonic masculinity and cisheteronormativity which is also idealized in Japanese contexts. Contrary to *hoso maccho,* Joe explained that he

thinks *gori maccho* (ゴリマッチョ [*gori* is short for gorilla]) is the ideal masculinity. *Gori maccho* indicates the physical strength and bodybuilder-type masculinity which reifies the traditional values of masculinity and hegemonic masculinity.

On the note of masculinity, Kouki also elaborated, as follows:

I'm not masculine at all … I think I'm far from the general sense of the manly figure. But I feel I'm not masculine, in a good way. If you say being masculine, I have images of being reliable but selfish and a bit arrogant at the same time. So, I'm not masculine, in a good way because I'm not like that at all. I'm, if anything, compassionate and a good listener.

In his narrative, he repeatedly expressed *ii-imi de otoko-rashiku nai* (良い意味で男らしく無い) that he is not masculine but *in a good way*. When he said he is not masculine, the masculinity he is referring to is the hegemonic masculinity, largely consumed and performed in everyday contexts. Compared to hegemonic masculinity, he explained that his masculinity does not associate with the traits of hegemonic masculinity. Rather, he values being compassionate and a good listener which are sensitive and passive (feminine) traits of communication.

Specifically, he further explained his masculinity, "My face is kind of feminine, not a typical man. I mean, not masculine. If anything, I'm like an ennui and neutral *boy* rather than a *man*." Referring to his phenotype (i.e., facial features and body type), he expressed his masculinity as *ennui* and *neutral*. Here, *ennui* is not used in the same way as the original meaning of laziness, fatigue, or negative connotations. Rather, in Japanese term, *annyui* (アンニュイ [literally, ennui]) means something mysterious and attractive because of its

ambiguity. With its ambiguity, his gender expression is *neutral* (a mixture of male and female features). Here, Kouki's narrative coincides with the possibility of Japanese masculinity in reconfiguring androgyny or feminine values as socially accepted performances of masculinity as well as challenging hegemonic masculinity (Darling-Wolf, 2004). But simultaneously, his narrative still communicates the binary frameworks of male/female and masculine/feminine as fixed values associated with his constitution of masculinity. Therefore, their narratives revealed the nuances and negotiations of how the idea of masculinity is perceived and performed through their bodies. In the next section, I provide my analysis of narratives that is centering the issues of the sexuality system in relation to intersecting politics of race, ethnicity, and gender.

### *Reifying Heterosexuality*

Throughout the interviews, I noticed that many interviewees used the word *futsuu* (普通 [literally, normal, ordinary, or typical]) for describing their sexual identity. For example, Kouki frequently said, "僕は普通にストレート (I'm normal, straight)" and "普通に女性が好きでヘテロセクシャルです (I normally like women and I'm heterosexual)." Here, his expression of *I normally like women* is a Japanese way of saying *I like women like typical people.* His expression of *futsuu* about his sexuality literally denotes cisheteronormativity, being straight or heterosexual is normative based on the fixed binary thinking of gender and sexuality. Moreover, as expressed in other narratives, cisheteronormative notions of marriage and reproduction are taken for granted through their understandings and practices of gender and sexuality.

Teru described his understanding of sexuality as follows:

I think sexuality is related to how human beings have been born. To me, I believe every human has their own way of living whether they are homosexual, have gender identity disorder, or something else. I think heterosexual people are the majority of the current world, so, that has been common sense. This is a totally different scale, but if there is another planet like Earth in this galaxy, and if homosexual people are the majority, they are the norm, right? So, I just think the majority is the norm and I think of myself as normal.

His description of being the majority as the norm of society sustains how other interviewees use *futsuu* in their expressions. As a cisgender heterosexual male, they feel that they are *futsuu* because they have not had the need to question their gender/sexual identity — the privilege of unchallenged view as a part of the dominant gender/sexual groups. This logic coincides with the strategic rhetoric of whiteness (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). Nakayama and Krizek (1995) reminded us that "strategic rhetoric is not itself a place, but it functions to resecure the center, the place, for whites." (p. 295) Moreover, queer scholars challenge that straightness as a mundane performance of gender and sexuality. Thus, the stability and fixed identity category and performance of heterosexuality and binary frameworks must be continuously critiqued (e.g., Eguchi, 2011/2015; Eguchi & Asante, 2016; LeMaster, 2015; Yep, 2003/2017). In the case of Teru's narrative, heterosexuality is strategically re-centered by the dominant structure of power and the narrative reifies its centrality and I must challenge the maintenance and reinforcement of cisheteronormativity.

While most narratives reify the dominant discourse of hegemonic masculinity and cisheteronormativity, some interviewees disclosed that they have questioned their

(hetero)sexuality after they moved to the U.S. and started participating in online dating apps. Takumi shared his experience of questioning his (hetero)sexuality, as follows:

> I'm always spending time in the workplace where the majority of colleagues are women, and there are many homosexuals among those few male colleagues. So, sometimes I questioned my sexual preferences. You know, do I have a temperament for being homosexual and do I have the potential of being homosexual? I have questioned before. But eventually, there were many moments that I thought "ah, I'm heterosexual after all," so I realized that I'm not homosexual.

As I was listening to his narratives during the interview, I often questioned his use of *homosexual* to indicate gay people, not only in this narrative but also throughout the interview. Because he consistently used *homosexual,* I remember feeling conflicted in my mind while listening to his narratives. Until the late 20th century, homosexuality has been considered as a mental disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) (Silverstein, 2009). Here, the use of the term *homosexuals* for gay people is problematic as it highlights the historical construction of homosexuality as abnormal; hence, in need of treatment. While I could see that Takumi was not intentional in using *homosexual* as a medical term and derogatory to call gay people, his usage of the term denotes his privilege of not knowing the sociocultural and historical implications of gender and sexuality behind the term. Simultaneously, I reflect on my reaction to his use of *homosexual(s)* during the interview. As an interviewer, I reacted nothing to his use of the term. I am ashamed of myself — with knowing the derogatory implications of the term, I did not call him out. I could have explained based on my knowledge and that could have been a meaningful conversation with him but I did not. In this vein, I reflect that I failed my ethical

responsibility as a critical scholar when experiencing moments like this, but I remained silent. Thus, I write this reflection on my shameful reaction to the interviewee.

Moreover, his narrative articulated that his workplace environment and relationships with his colleagues in the U.S. made him question his own (hetero)sexuality. He also added that he has been extremely popular among gay users on the online dating app. Even when he was using Bumble BFF (the purpose is to develop friendships), he received so many *likes* from gay men and they approached him with the purpose of seeking romantic/sexual relationships. Being popular/attractive to gay users in online dating sounds nice and flattering; but simultaneously, I assert Takumi's heterosexual privilege as he engages with other gay users. He told me that he would feel *wary* or *alerted* when he realizes that gay users are approaching him with the purpose of developing romantic/sexual relationships. The specific choices of expression such as *wary* and *alerted* demonstrate his insecurity of heterosexuality and how (hetero)sexuality is embodied as a fixed and monolithic category. Moreover, his narrative communicates the binary framework of heterosexuality/homosexuality which homogenizes the understandings of gender and sexuality and reinforces heterosexual privileges. As Yep (2003) emphasized, heterosexuality "is not natural, universal, transhistorical, fixed, stable, or monolithic" (p. 26; see also, Butler, 1993; Eguchi, 2015; Jones & Calafell, 2012). Rather, social meanings attached to heterosexual desire have historically been invented as natural and universal behavior and are still firmly governed by the structures and systems of society. While he has experienced a moment of questioning his (hetero)sexual identity which I find is a possibility to destabilize cisheteronormativity, his heterosexuality is further affirmed by securing the stability of heterosexuality.

Matt also shared his experience of having questioned his (hetero)sexuality, as follows:

I always had an interest in women, attracted to women, so that's how I know [that I'm heterosexual]. Did I ever question I'm gay or something? Yeah, sometimes I think about it, like, can I be? Could I be a gay person? But I realize "ah, *yappari* (やっぱり [I knew it])," people I was so interested in were women, so yeah. I did have gay friends in high school and college too. So yeah, I have a couple of friends who changed [their sexual preferences]. They used to say they like girls, but then they changed. So, I thought it's possible to change the preferences but for me, I never felt that I could be gay or something.

Similarly, Yusuke described that "I have quite a lot of friends who are gay. Then, I have also thought about it because my gay friends misidentified me like 'you are gay, aren't you?' It also thought about 'maybe?' but I'm not, you know." Here, I also challenge cisheteronormativity, the binary frameworks of gender and sexuality communicated from Matt and Yusuke in addition to Takumi's narrative. Matt's process of questioning "am I gay?" implies the binary of either heterosexual or homosexual which limits the understandings of sexuality as fluid and exists within the spectrum. Moreover, his realization of "oh, I knew I was interested in women" indicates the binary thinking of either men or women. Simultaneously, cisgenderness is taken for granted in his narrative. Yusuke's narrative also insinuates the binary of straight/gay. In this vein, their sexual desire is governed by the binary structures of gender and sexuality. Moreover, their cisgender and heterosexual identities are embodied as if they are stable and normal. Thus, I reiterate the significance of queering such *imagined* stability and normativity of cisheterosexuality.

144

For Matt, he is aware that sexuality can be changed over time through witnessing his friends from high school and college who have later changed their sexual preferences (i.e., from heterosexual to gay). In this vein, he acknowledges sexuality as a fluid concept (e.g., Butler, 1990). But simultaneously, his perspective still falls under the binary framework of heterosexual/gay and his heterosexuality reinserts the impossibility of embodied and fluid process of the body. As Yep (2003) asserted, "heterosexuality is not an independent and stable master category but rather, a subservient and unstable construct in need of constant affirmation and protection" (p. 13). Although they have had experiences of questioning their sexuality, it has been stabilized in their understandings by the process of affirming heterosexuality. As I engage with their narratives, I ask, what does it mean by *completely* and *naturally* straight or heterosexual? All interviewees self-identify themselves as straight or heterosexual. But from my scholarly belief of gender and sexuality as fluid, I challenge the stability reinforced through interviewees' narratives.

Reflecting on my own sexuality, I also self-identify as heterosexual like my interviewees. However, I continuously question what it means to be heterosexual and what are the nuanced understandings of heterosexuality that is not a fixed identity category? In this regard, I challenge interviewees and my straightness or heterosexuality as a fixed identity. For example, there are occasions when I find other men good-looking or attractive based on how they look or act. I also enjoy hugging and cuddling with my close male friends. Here, I draw on Han's (2015) assertion that sexuality is not merely about the choice of sexual partners but also about how one makes sense of their identity in relation to others in society. Because the acts of hugging and cuddling can be intimate behaviors, I challenge how do those acts mean to my own sexuality. Moreover, I find myself uncomfortable reflecting and

sharing the fact I enjoy hugging and cuddling with close male friends because of my insecurity of (cishetersexual) hegemonic masculinity. Considering hugging and cuddling as relatively *soft* and less masculine behaviors through hegemonic masculinity as the status quo, I have struggled to admit such acts as parts of my gender and sexuality. I challenge that this is the cisheteronormative ideology that affects my insecurity and uncomfortableness of not following how a normal (cisgender heterosexual) man is supposed to act. But simultaneously, I am receiving benefits as a cisgender heterosexual male within the dominant structures of power such as patriarchy and cisheteronormativity. Thus, through my reflection, I reiterate that gender and sexuality must be understood as a spectrum. Although I align my gender and sexuality with cisgender male and heterosexual, this does not mean that my gender and sexuality are fixed and stable. Rather, understandings, practices, and performances of gender and sexuality will change and continue to shift as fluid and unstable identities of my body.

Like Yusuke's experience of being told by others "you are gay, aren't you?", other interviewees also had experienced being questioned about their (hetero)sexuality by others. While I could relate to their narratives based on my experiences, I find particularly interesting how common it is for Japanese men to be missexualized as gay. This patterned narrative coincides with the scholarship on Asian/American masculinity how it is often associated with the attribution of asexual, effeminate, and gayness; therefore, Asian/American men are lacking their masculinity (e.g., Chen, 1996; Chou et al., 2012; Shimizu, 2012). It is important to draw on Asian/American scholarship because Japanese men become racialized as Asian men once they entered the U.S. (Sekimoto, 2014) For example, when I fill out the check box for the racial category for the U.S. Census and other forms such as medical questionnaires, I check the box of *Asian* because they often do not

have the option to specify my Japanese ethnicity. Moreover, in everyday interactions with others in the U.S., people will not be able to identify my ethnicity. Rather, I am racialized as an Asian and/or Asian American man. Thus, Japanese men's experiences align with the discourses of Asian/American scholarship within the systems of U.S. race, gender, and sexuality.

Matt remembered his memory, as follows:

I have experiences of people saying to me "are you gay?" Because when I meet with friends, we talk about sexuality sometimes and they think that [I] might be [gay]. But like girls. I used to travel a lot when I was in college, so I did many road trips with my friends. When you're doing road trips, you have to make rest stops on a freeway … and I got asked a couple of times on those rest area stops like, "oh are you gay?" I think gay people were looking for partners there at the rest area.

Similarly, Kouki shared his past experiences in the U.S., as follows:

There are so many times [I've been questioned about my sexuality] … People often think that I'm gay. I think there is quite a bit of reason why people think I'm gay. One is I don't have a girlfriend for a long time. While I've been dating women in the past years, the last time I had a girlfriend was eight years ago … Also, I don't really actively talk about my relationship status to other people … And, my face. People told me that I have a face that gay people would like.

This Kouki's narrative illuminates his insecurity of heterosexuality that he is often suspected by others that he is gay. He has not been with a girlfriend for a long-term relationship for a while. Said differently, his (hetero)sexuality has been policed by others and being in a committed relationship is a way for his heterosexuality to be affirmed or confirmed. In this

vein, his experience supports the literature on stereotypes associated with gay men which are "sexually promiscuous … with an inability to develop long-term intimate relationships" (Felmlee et al., 2010, p. 227). His narrative also reifies racialized and sexualized discourses of Asian/American men and masculinity that they are asexual, effeminate, and gay (Shimizu, 2012). Reflecting on my experiences, I have been told by a cismale bisexual white friend that "You look like a twink." My friend explained to me that twink is a term to describe a type of gay masculinity that conforms to the stereotypes of effeminate or so-called *pretty boys* who are slim and young-looking. This was a moment when I realized how my racialized Asian body is associated with particular gender and sexuality discourses, exemplifying Asian/American scholarship of Asian men and masculinity as effeminate and queer within the U.S. society. Thus, connecting to Kouki, Matt, and other interviewees' narratives, U.S.-based Japanese men's experiences correspond to the U.S. racial, gender, and sexual discourses – feminization and sexualization of the Asian body (e.g, Chen, 1996; Chou et al., 2012; Shimizu, 2012).

In further examining their understandings and practices of sexuality, a religious belief emerged as another important identity layer for some interviewees. For example, Kuma and Matt are Christian. As Matt previously expressed the reaffirmation of his heterosexuality in his narrative, his religious identity as a Christian also affected his understanding of sexuality which reifies the stability of heterosexuality. Matt connected his (hetero)sexuality to his religious belief, as follows:

> Because I was a Christian, when I was on the dating sites, I wasn't interested in someone who wants a gay relationship or open relationship or is a bisexual person or something. So, definitely for me, I wasn't interested in that part. So that's that. And

also, in terms of sexuality, because I was Christian, I was hoping to meet someone

who's not open to just have casual sex. I wanted to meet someone who is more

committed. But I was not like I was only looking for someone who never had sex …

But at the same time, it wouldn't be a good match with someone who is sort of open

about sleeping with many different people. I thought it's not gonna be a good match

for me.

As demonstrated in this narrative, religion has been a core factor influencing his

understanding and practice of heterosexuality as well as his sexual preferences in online

dating contexts. He expressed a commitment to the Christian faith and natural law, which

determined the kinds of partners he was and was not interested in. But in his response, he

showed this commitment is flexible to some degree in regard to the partner's sexual history.

Natural law is a Christian view of human nature determining what is right/wrong and, at least

in the Catholic church, is what forbids homosexuality (Pope, 1997). Homosexuality is

considered an *unnatural* sexual behavior in opposition to *natural* heterosexuality. Here,

Matt's narrative started by referring to the Christian dogma that governs which kind of

relationship he can be in by excluding gay, bisexual, and open relationships. This can be

interpreted as the purity of Christianity communicated through his belief. While *purity* is not

explicitly communicated in his narrative, his expectation for the partner's commitment to the

relationship and heterosexuality as the right or only choice denotes his value of purity in

sexual behavioral qualities and histories. Thus, in his narrative, heterosexuality is presented

as a monolithic and stable notion that is guided by the Christian faith and

cisheteronormativity.

I challenge this monolithic and binary belief deeply embedded in the religion. Matt's narrative literally showcases the binary of gender (cismale/cisfemale) and sexuality (heterosexual/homosexual) which problematically limits nuanced and complex understandings of gender and sexuality. I reiterate that heterosexuality is not universal, normal, and stable (Yep, 2003), and as demonstrated from Matt's narrative, cisheteronormative discourses of Christianity must be problematized. Miller (2021) critiqued the cisheterosexist discourse of Christian identity that determines what is a *proper* sexual subject and further reinforces *white Christian supremacy* in the U.S. nation-state. In the case of Matt's narrative, white Christian supremacy in the U.S. context is inserted through his judgment of what is *proper* or right sexual orientation and practice based on his religion. Particularly, his remark about cisheteronormative sexual preferences in relation to Christianity is a microaggression against gay people and women.

Similarly, Kuma expressed, "Honestly, if I use the Christian filter, I don't like women who are bitch-ish, selecting men just for fulfilling their sexual desire. I don't want women who date men only to satisfy their sexual needs." Here, he literally used *bitch-ish* in describing women who do not align with his (Christian) preferences of sexual activities. In addition to the reinserted binary framework of men and women in discussing sexual desire, I call out this sexist assertion and microaggression against women working with Christianity. Both Kuma and Matts' narratives elucidate their problematic views about *proper* gender and sexuality through religious belief, specifically white Christian supremacy exemplified by their evaluation of sexual activities that inferiorize and marginalize gay people and women. For example, they both prefer someone who is either a good Christian (e.g., virgin/no pre-marital sex) or someone *close enough*, who has a very small number of previous sexual

partners. Especially, Kuma described women who date men for the purposes of casual relationships as *bitch-ish*. His pejorative expression to women with no or less commitment to romantic/sexual relationships communicates his Christina faith, ethics of what is right or not. Thus, I problematize reinforced cisheteronormative narratives working with religion from interviewees that specifically communicate sexism, microaggression, and male supremacy oriented toward gay people and women.

In addition to Matt and Takumi's experiences of being approached by gay men in general or in online dating apps, Kouki also made a direct connection to the racial hierarchy persisting in the U.S. based on his experience, as follows:

> Once, I was almost sexually assaulted by a white gay man. Generally speaking though, white people have an idea that they can control others. They want to be superior to everything. It may be a strange way of saying that they can dominate other people, but I think they have the sense of being able to put other people under the thumb of white people … I feel this on a regular basis.

Here, he articulated the dominant matrix of power such as whiteness, white superiority, and racial hierarchy in the everyday U.S. social context. His particular experience of being approached by a white gay man coincides with the raced, gendered, and sexualized discourse of romantic/sexual relationships. For example, critical scholarship elucidated the cultural and social phenomena of racial fetish — popularly known as White males exclusively prefer Asian males and females (i.e., *yellow fever* and *rice queens*) as romantic and/or sexual partners (Eguchi, 2020; Zheng, 2016). Zheng (2016) argued that yellow fever is a *racialized sexual phenomenon* that non-Asian person's exclusive or near-exclusive preference for sexual intimacy with Asian men and women. Zheng problematized the racial and sexual

implications of yellow fever that are often considered as flattering and/or less harmful aesthetic preferences for Asian women (and men). This racial fetish reinforces the historical and categorical oppression through the systems of gender and sexuality by sexually objectifying Asian women and LGBTQ people. Moreover, White gay men who fetishize Asian men are called *rice queens* and this fetishization/sexualization is deeply rooted in (white) colonial and orientalist views of Asian gay men as feminine and submissive *bottoms* who are receptive partners (Eguchi, 2015/2020; Han, 2015). While Kouki is a heterosexual cisgender man, his previous narratives indicate how his feminine phenotype has been missexualized as gay. This particular sexualization coincides with the critical and queer scholarship on the feminization and fetishization of Asian men. Thus, his experiences highlight an ongoing racialized, gendered, and sexualized discourses of Japanese men participating in online dating apps.

### *Reflective Summary*

Closely reading the interviewees' narratives, this theme documented their overall impression of participating in online dating apps as well as their understandings and practices of self-expression, masculinity, and (hetero)sexuality. Specifically, I examined Japanese men's racial, gender, and sexual account to further unpack theoretical and conceptual implications anchored in their narratives. My analysis revealed their feelings of struggle to match and implicitly and/or explicitly communicated the dominant matrix of power through their online dating experiences. Through an intersectional approach, I looked into how the dominant systems such as whiteness, patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and cisheteronormativity affect their experiences, and how their narratives inform and reify such dominant powers. Cisheteronormativity was constantly communicated and embodied

throughout interviewees' narratives, and their heterosexual privileges were taken for granted. Importantly, their narratives working with cisheteronormativity often revealed sexism and homophobia against women and gay people.

Firstly, their feelings of struggle to match with other people in online dating apps are commonly shared by the interviewees' narratives. One of the core processes of developing romantic/sexual relationships in online dating apps is to match with other users. However, they felt particularly challenging from the start because they could not even match with others. These experiences illuminated racial, gender, and sexual discourses pertaining to whiteness and Japaneseness. Some interviewees compared their online dating experiences with people around them (e.g., hafu with white phenotypes and Japanese women) and felt they are not popular or attractive in the space. By documenting their narratives, I find there were a series of barriers Japanese men expressed as challenges. For example, they felt some difficulties in self-expressing/presenting themselves in the online dating profile. The language was a salient factor impacting their comfortability of expressing themselves in writing. Because they are ESL speakers, some associated their positionality as ESL speakers as inferior to native English speakers. Their narratives illuminated the role of power in SAE and white superiority. But simultaneously, their identity communicated through their narratives about struggles/challenges revealed the taken-for-granted privilege of class and social capital such as SAE language proficiency, financial stability, and global mobility.

Moreover, the geographical location was another important factor for interviewees in participating in online dating. Their narratives elucidated the relationship between Japanese identity and the history of Japanese/Asian diaspora and immigration in certain spaces/places in the U.S. Since online dating apps allow users to match regardless of location wherever

they are, there are increasing possibilities to find potential romantic/sexual partners without geographical borders. For example, Teru could match and start building a romantic relationship with a woman who lives in Hong Kong while living in the U.S. But simultaneously, some interviewees felt developing romantic/sexual relationships to be unrealistic when the matches are residing far away from them because it will be challenging to see each other in-person. Especially, the travel restrictions and social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic created more obstacles for interviewees to find physical contact.

Narratives of Japanese men also highlighted culturally specific knowledge that affect their romantic/sexual relationship building through their racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual accounts. Specifically, narratives illuminated the interviewees' white masculine idealism. Some concepts such as *kokuhaku*, *teishu kanpaku*, *senaka de kataru*, *femio*, and *hoso/gori maccho* highlighted the constructions and associations of gender norms/roles, heterosexuality, and Japanese masculinity in relation to whiteness, hegemonic masculinity, and cisheteronormativity. While the dominant ideology of hegemonic masculinity is reified as a fundamental quality of masculinity in Japanese men's everyday contexts (i.e., Brad Pitt as their ideal image of a man), narratives elucidated the possibility of Japanese masculinity that reconfigures hegemonic masculinity. Importantly, their narratives reminded how gender and sexuality discourses are inseparable in culturally and socially constructing certain perceptions, performances, and practices.

Lastly, most of the narratives confirmed the interviewees' embodiment of cisheteronormativity through their everyday life and online dating experiences. Consequently, I argue that their narratives revealed sexism and homophobia against women and gay people. As a cultural insider, I understand that interviewees were not intentional or

154

conscious of such vectors against women and gay people. However, I call out that this unintentionality or unconsciousness is their cismale and heterosexual privilege of ignorance or not knowing historical, sociocultural, and political oppression pertaining to marginalized groups of people. Some interviewees literally described that being heterosexual is *futsuu* which explicitly communicated heterosexuality as the norm. While some interviewees have questioned their (hetero)sexuality in the past, heterosexuality and its centrality has consistently been reaffirmed. As an important finding, religion emerged as another essential identity layer in addition to race, ethnicity, and gender for some interviewees in understanding and practicing (hetero)sexuality. Those narratives centered Christian faith and emphasized heterosexuality as a fixed and stable entity that reduces complex and nuanced understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality into simplistic and binary categories as a whole (Manning, 2015). Importantly, the religious layer further elucidated how Christianity works with sexism, male supremacy, and homophobia. Overall, I assert the problematic rhetoric of cisheteronormativity that it strategically makes racial, gender, and sexual oppression or marginalization oblivious and promotes the centricity of dominant power. Their narratives illuminated how the larger structures of power such as whiteness, Japaneseness, patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and cisheteronormativity are reified and/or challenged.

**Feeling Proud: Japanese Exceptionalism and Nationalism in Online Dating**

In this theme, I turn my focus on the interviewees' understandings, self-presentation, and strategies of their racial, gender, and sexual accounts in online dating. While each interviewee comes from different life circumstances, occupations, and dating experiences, the most salient theme that emerged from their interview narratives was the significance of self-identifying/presenting their Japanese identity and culture in the online dating space.

Connecting to the findings from the previous theme, all interviewees have felt difficulty matching with other online dating users. Thus, one of the strategies for them to accomplish matches was to intentionally present their identity as Japanese on their online dating profiles. For example, some narratives illustrate that valuing the sense/quality of Japanese (e.g., being harmonious, respectful, and reciprocal) is significant in constituting their identity as well as developing relationships in online dating apps. This significance of being Japanese led to their pride and patriotism associated with Japan's nation-state, ethnocentrism, and exceptionalism. Moreover, in strategizing their participation in online dating apps, the Japanese government's project of *Cool Japan* was incorporated as an effective tool for them to be marketable in the online dating space. In this regard, I specifically paid attention to the relationships of how race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and nationality shape and reshape Japanese men's experiences in the online dating space.

### *The Significance of Being Japanese*

As I engage with narratives, I find it interesting that many interviewees expressed that intentionally presenting their Japanese identity is one of the most important aspects of participating in online dating apps. Before conducting the interviews, I thought I could hear more about their negotiations and navigation of being racialized as Asian in the U.S. context. However, their narratives specifically highlighted the significance of being Japanese because they consider intentionally presenting the values/senses of being Japanese as an effective way to match with other users. Specifically, they were self-conscious about how Japanese identity is *well-received* by non-Japanese users. In response to my question asking how they understand their identity in general or online dating while having experiences living in Japan and the U.S., Matt answered, as follows:

As far as my identity, my time in the U.S. is much longer than in Japan because I

came to the U.S. when I was in high school. But I feel like I still have a strong sense

of being Japanese. In my life, sometimes, I act more Japanese than Japanese people

who just came from Japan to the U.S. And I think a part of it is because I have lived

in Michigan where I didn't have many Japanese people around me. So, I felt like I

need to represent Japan myself there. So, part of myself, I wanted to show the best

part of being Japanese to American society. So being courteous to others, being nice

to other people and helpful are the things I highly value.

Here, his general experiences in the U.S. have been influential in constituting his Japanese

identity. This is important to highlight because these experiences affect how he engages with

his self-identity and interactions with others in an online dating context. In Matt's experience

of living in Michigan where he could not find many other Japanese people around him, he

was compelled to represent "the best part of being Japanese." I connect his feeling of being

compelled to present *the best part of being Japanese* with the role of masculinity and

patriarchy.

As a cisgender Japanese man, Matt's act of performing *the best* inserts his manliness

on hegemonic terms, thus asserting patriarchal power over women. His narrative certainly

does not refer to women and his cismale identity and its patriarchal dominance are insinuated

in his expression of representing *the best part of being Japanese* as a Japanese man residing

in the U.S. While he has lived in the U.S. longer than his time in Japan, this environmental

circumstance led him to emphasize and express his sense of being Japanese to the people

around him. For example, he said, "I act more Japanese than Japanese people who just came

from Japan to the U.S." This exemplifies how the process of assimilation in the U.S. helped

him to maintain and strengthen the ethnic boundaries. In fact, he is married to a cisgender Japanese woman who he met on an online dating app in the U.S. His preference for dating or marrying a Japanese woman reveals the reinforced ethnic boundaries as he spends more time in the U.S. Moreover, he referred to "being courteous to others" and "being nice to other people and helpful" as highly valued ideas associated with his presentation of "the best part of being Japanese." These expressions demonstrate Japanese exceptionalism, how he views superior values in the quality of being Japanese as a Japanese man living in the U.S. In this vein, I argue that Matt's narrative communicates ethnocentrism and exceptionalism regarding Japanese identity within the U.S. space.

Like Matt's narrative, Japanese exceptionalism and ethnocentrism emerged as indispensable ideologies undergirding interviewees' senses and constitutions of identity. Kouki also expressed, "I'm from Japan, and I'm always being conscious about how I live and work as a Japanese following the Japanese moral senses/values ever since I came to the U.S." Here, Kouki refers to the Japanese moral sense/values that are called *dotoku* (道徳 [literally, morality]) and usually incorporated in *tokuiku* (徳育), one of the core requirements of the Japanese education program in fostering the knowledge of morals, culture, emotions, and well-being of human being. According to Japan's Basic Education Law, *tokuiku* is explained as an activity of "personality formation that aims at the ideal human image of society (the country, the era)" (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, n.d., para. 2) with the purposes of reinforcing Japanese people's sense of norm, compassion, and harmony as a member of society. His articulation of the sense of being Japanese resonates with Matt's emphasis on valuing the Japanese quality in communicating his self-identity with others. Specifically, this highlights Japanese exceptionalism reinforced through their

experiences of living in the U.S. These values articulated by Matt and Kouki demonstrate the meaning of how U.S.-based Japanese men understand their sense of being Japanese working with Japanese exceptionalism and ethnocentrism.

Interviewees' sense/value of being Japanese, Japanese exceptionalism, and ethnocentrism were apparent in different contexts such as family, workplace, and politics. For example, Takumi expressed his identity that is related to his occupation and work experiences as follows:

I think I consciously have a sense of being Japanese a lot. It's been seven years since I came to the U.S., but I teach Japanese, so, in my profession, I work as a teacher by using my identity of being Japanese. In my workplace, I'm always living with the expectations from others to be Japanese and speak Japanese, so I have a strong consciousness about my identity as a Japanese.

Because being a Japanese language teacher at a four-year college in the U.S., his occupation and workplace experiences made him become particularly conscious about his understanding and presentation of self-identity as a Japanese. Rather than expressing the importance of their racial and racialized experiences as *Asians* in the U.S., Takumi and other interviewees persistently emphasized that being Japanese is significant for them. Here, I connect with how interviewees articulate the uniqueness of Japanese identity (i.e., *Nihonjinron* or Japaneseness) as a counterpart to American exceptionalism. As he is one of few Japanese native speakers to teach Japanese in his institution, his identity of being Japanese becomes a unique and exceptional quality in U.S. higher education. In this way, his consciousness of being Japanese has intensified after moving to the U.S. Like Takumi's experience, Teru also

159

talked about how his Japanese identity became more important after he came to the U.S. He shared, as follows:

> I absolutely have a strong sense of being Japanese, more than others, I think. But that doesn't mean that I have the feeling of doing something discriminatory to others. Yeah, if you are asked about this, I have the self-awareness that I have a strong identity of being Japanese more than others. Looking something like Japan's current economic situation, I also have a strong desire to do something to make some contribution to Japan. Especially, when you go abroad, I think there are many opportunities to learn about Japan which also make me realize how much I don't know about Japan. With learning more about myself, Japanese history, and culture that I didn't know much about before, I honestly think I have the self-awareness of loving Japan more than Japanese people in Japan. Because of that, I have experienced being told by Japanese people who live in the U.S. for a short-term stay or expatriates that I'm right-wing. But I'm not right-wing, I do call myself a patriot.

Migrating to the U.S. gave Teru an opportunity to see things differently, learn, and gain awareness of what he did not know when he was living in Japan. Especially, he has been living in the U.S. for over 10 years and his experiences of being mistakenly identified as right-wing by short-term migrants from Japan indicate how he built up the consciousness of being Japanese as the core value of his identity throughout the time he spent in the U.S.

Related to Matt and Kouki's responses about Japanese values and morality, I find the underlining objectives of promoting Japan's nationalistic discourse in constituting Japanese identity, culture, and value in the interviewees' responses. Like all other interviewees expressed the significance of being Japanese in describing their identities, Teru's reflection

160

exemplified how the understanding of their *self* is connected to patriotism and national

identity. I specifically highlight Japaneseness (*Nihonjinron*) as a nationalistic, male-oriented,

and masculinist discourse communicated through interviewees' narratives (e.g., patriarchy

and cisheteronormativity). As the discourse of Japaneseness exists with the belief of

homogeneity and political empowerment through westernization/internationalization

especially since the Meiji period, Japan's hegemonic power and nation-state have been

cultivated with diplomatic relationships with Asia and Western countries.

      With the maintenance of hegemonic power and Japanese exceptionalism, the system

of heteropatriarchy has been playing an important role in Japanese society. For example,

Japan's notions of family and kinship are still deeply rooted in the purity of blood lineage

and patriarchy through law and policy. There have been movements to construct partnership

systems for gay couples, yet gay marriage has not been legalized in Japan. Japan's largest

religion, Shinto works with sexist beliefs considering women's blood as *unclean*; hence,

women are restricted to enter traditional or religious spaces and places such as certain areas

of shrines, the sumo wrestling arena, and mountains in today's Japan. These examples clearly

demonstrate how gender and sexuality discourses of Japaneseness are constituted with

heterosexism and patriarchy in maintaining the dominant power structures. Thus, when I

engage with interviewees' narratives expressing their patriotism and exceptionalism of Japan,

I connect their cismale and heterosexual identity working with historically embedded

patriarchy and cisheteronormativity.

      The significance of their senses/values of being Japanese is no exception to their

online dating experiences. Specifically, many interviewees stressed how they use their

Japanese identity as their strong and/or selling point in order to match with others in the

online dating market. In other words, they use their Japanese identity as one of the strategies for navigating the online dating space and interactions. For example, Yusuke said, "In my profile, I write something like 'Born and Raised in Japan' and continue by introducing what I like to do." In writing his bio for the online dating profile, he specifies that he is born and raised in Japan. Teru explained how he creates the online dating profiles, as follows:

> I usually start with "Hi, I'm Teru" and write "I'm Japanese," followed by "100% pure Japanese." A part of me wanted to figure out how much a Japanese man is popular in online dating. I think there are a variety of women who prefers, for example, Chinese, Korean, and Thai men. With that, I don't think not many people put "100% pure Japanese" in the profile. You know, it's like the same as job hunting in Japan, I recognized creating a dating profile is like how much you can make yourself to stand out at the first glance. So, I think there were many people who matched with me because they wondered "this guy writes 100% Japanese but what does that mean?" So, I was quite intentional about that. It was also a space where I could express my strong sense of being Japanese.

In his explanation of the online dating profile, it is apparent how the understanding of his own identity, a strong sense of being Japanese reflected in strategizing the online dating profile. Here, I reiterate the dominant discourse of Japaneseness in his strategy of intentionally highlighting his Japanese identity in the profile. Because Japaneseness as nationalism was emerged in light of pushing Japanese exceptionalism (e.g., the uniqueness of Japanese identity and cultural values), Teru's act of emphasizing the sense of being Japanese is a strategic move for him to stand out in the online dating space, coinciding with the discourse of Japaneseness and embodiment of national identity.

He also finds the similarity between his participation in online dating and the job-hunting strategy of self-presentation in Japan. In the online dating space, one needs to stand out and attract other users in order to match and develop romantic/sexual relationships. In the job market space, it is similar in the sense that one needs to stand out and *match* with the companies or institutions that he wants to work with. In both spaces, one must be attractive enough for others to be selected as potential romantic/sexual or business partners. Thus, this juxtaposition denotes the competitiveness of the online dating space where you need to make yourself stand out in order to grab other users' attention and to be selected by others. Matt also uttered, "In online dating sites, you have to compete a little bit with other guys. So, you have to put things that kind of show the best part of yourself and not to show any negative parts of yourself there." Asano-Cavanagh and Farese (2020) found the cultural meanings and social pressures associated with *konkatsu* (婚活 [marriage partner-seeking]) and *shukatsu* (就活 [job-seeking]) that there is a shared "sense of compulsion and competition as [Japanese] people are aware of the risk that, if they are not fully committed, others will achieve the desired result before or instead of them" (p. 20). While seeking romantic partners (*koikatsu* [恋活]) and *konkatsu* are not exactly the same in their purposes and contexts, they both speak to the overarching goal of cultivating romantic/sexual relationships. Moreover, they argued that Japanese people's devotion to *konkatsu* and *shukatsu* exemplifies how traditional values of family and job are socially respected and expected in today's Japanese society.

Here, I challenge cisheteronormative ideologies deeply rooted in *konkatsu* and *shukatsu*. For example, ideas of having a stable job and getting married work together to bring so-called *happiness* in cisheteronormative life paths and social expectations in Japan. I recently talked with a cismale heterosexual Japanese friend that he is now engaged and going

163

to be married. He told me, "ついに幸せになります！ (Finally, I will become happy!)" This direct translation does not mean that he was unhappy being single. Rather, this is a nuanced Japanese way to express the fulfillment of happiness by the fact of getting married. In this vein, the fulfillment of the expected cultural and social norm or ideal of adulthood is a part of cisheteronormative life planning in Japan. Both social expectations of getting married and a job are highly gendered in Japanese society that men are pressured to be successful in *shukatsu* within the patriarchal system, gender norms, and aesthetics of masculinity (i.e., financially providing and supporting family). Women are often systemically situated as financially dependent on men within patriarchy and the gender wage gap. The idea of getting married is considered as *normal* adulthood in Japan and social stigma is particularly associated with women because of the *biological clock* tied to their ability to marriage and reproduction (Koike, 2013). Thus, social pressures both men and women experience are contextually different; however, cisheteronormative ideologies based on binary frameworks of gender, sex, and sexuality and traditional values of family and job continue to evaluate what does the *right* life path supposed to look like. Here, Japaneseness is a masculinist discourse, maintaining and reinforcing the positionalities of privilege and marginalization through socially and culturally deep-rooted patriarchy, cisheteronormativity, and capitalism.

Further unpacking Teru's strategy for the online dating profile, I highlight the homogenizing discourse of race/ethnicity from his expression of *100% pure Japanese*. In the Japanese context, homogeneity is defined as "a historical stream of discursive institutionalizations of cultural markers and performative acts; it is of our own doing for/to ourselves and to others … we instrumentalize and mobilize homogeneity … as a mode of dominating, silencing, and marginalizing *Others*" (Toyosaki & Eguchi, 2017, p. 3; emphasis

164

in original). Particularly in Japanese culture, there is a popular term called *Jun Japa* (純ジャ

パ [literally, pure Japanese]). This term is usually used to describe Japanese students who

have never experienced abroad (Iino & Murata, 2013); hence, it is often an identification for

Japanese people who have less proficiency in foreign language skills (mainly in English)

because of their lack of experience abroad (Aso, 2015). This example of the term *Jun Japa*

reveals an exclusionary discourse of Japaneseness (e.g., aesthetics of racial/ethnic purity) that

marginalizes racial/ethnic minorities such as indigenous and mixed Japanese people as

*impure*, *less Japanese*, and *not Japanese enough* in opposition to purity as the status quo

(Kimura, 2021b).

      While the word *Jun Japa* signifies the inferiority of Japanese people who have never

experienced abroad in the global world, it also insinuates the historical continuum of Japan's

racial purity as the status quo. Shoji (2015) highlighted that Japanese society is "exclusive to

foreigners and mixed-race Japanese and that 'pure Japanese lineage' is likely to be a

measurement of inclusion or 'full membership' to the Japanese society" (para. 3).

Simultaneously, *Jun Japa* ignores the existence of returnees and their parents who are

ethnically Japanese with Japanese nationality, excluding them from the category of *pure*

*Japanese*. With the historical context of Japan's Westernization at the end of the Meiji era,

racial/ethnic othering was strategically incorporated into Japanese culture and society by

creating the boundary between *Japanese purity* and *foreign impurity* (Iwabuchi, 1998). In

this vein, the idea of *pure Japanese* represents Japan's nationalistic discourse and

homogenous belief of Japan as a nation with one race (Akagawa, 2014; Yamaguchi, 2020). I

view this nationalism associated with Japan's racial purity is one of the reasons why

interviewees tend to avoid seeing their race as Asian in the U.S. Their sense of Japanese as a

race within the historical discourses of Asian hegemony, westernization/internationalization, and patriarchy is culturally and socially engrained in their identity. Thus, Teru's strategy of intentionally expressing himself as *100% pure Japanese* demonstrates how Japan's nationalism and racial homogeneity are embedded in the everyday context and continue to sustain the masculinist discourse of Japaneseness.

> Takumi also shared his strategy for crafting his online dating profile as follows:
> Later, I included that I'm Japanese. Like, a Japanese who lives where and things I like, so, beer and sports. So, I wrote like "let's go out and grab some drinks" and "if you go out for drinks with me, I'll buy you a drink." My strategy was to make them think that I'd buy a drink if they go out with me, or they can get along with me if they like to drink beer or they can enjoy outdoor stuff like hiking with me. In this way, maybe I can match with people even from being friends. I didn't put "Japanese" in my profile at the beginning because I wasn't aware, but later I realized that the people I matched with were like "oh, you're Japanese" and interested in me because of that. Based on this kind of good reception about Japanese people from foreign people, I started to intentionally express that I'm Japanese.

In addition to intentionally expressing his Japanese identity in an online dating profile, Takumi touched on his strategy of getting matches by buying a drink for people who would go out with him. In Japanese society, *nomication* (飲みニケーション) has been a popular style of communication. This is a mash-up word of *nomi* (飲み [drinking]) and *communication*, which usually refers to the acts of sharing time and space over alcoholic drinks for the purposes of socialization and networking among a variety of relationship contexts such as family, romance, friends, and workplace. Importantly, *nomication* is

historically a highly masculine and classist culture in workplace contexts which follows

traditional gender norms and tends to benefit men-to-men relationships and exclude women

with children or socially positioned in a lower status (Kimura et al., 2010). By situating

women in socially lower positions, they often do not have the accessibility to participate in

*nomication*; hence, opportunities for women to receive information and cultivate networks

are limited in this masculinist practice and space.

In today's Japan, *nomication* as a male-exclusive space has been changing with the

emphasis on women's rights and gender equality. It is now considered generally as a

valuable experience in Japanese culture because *nomication* offers an "intimate relationship

for knowledge exchange" (Fujita, 2012). However, I still problematize how gender norms are

still persistently associated with *nomication*. For example, Takuya's act of buying drinks

(involving alcohol) to seek his romantic desire and negotiation for intimacy communicates

his embodiment of hegemonic masculinity, a masculinist performance in *nomication*. In

this context, Takuya's expectation to seek relationships based on the act of *financial*

*investment* (i.e., buying drinks) for women is problematic because it assumes women to

accept or appreciate in return for his financial investment, situating women in a passive or

economically dependent position. Moreover, this assumption embodies the

cisheteronormative ideology within the *nomication* context through reinserted gender

norms and heterosexist performances.

Træen et al. (1998) connected the gender role to this act that buying drinks for women

demonstrates men's decency in establishing romantic relationships. They further underlined

that "buying drinks symbolises having invested money – as opposed to time – in the woman,

and she should recognise and appreciate the investment that the man has made" (p. 81). In

167

Takumi's context, saying "if you go out for drinks with me, I'll buy you a drink" signifies his financial investment associated with the male gender norm and aesthetics of providing for women. Here, this is not just about the issues of gender; his act is always cisheteronormative — the binary structure of men and women with gender norms of men financially investing/providing for women and women passively receiving the offer. Moreover, he intentionally uses this strategy of buying drinks for women based on his assumption of other female users would recognize and appreciate his *financial investment* which would lead him to more matches in online dating apps. Thus, this act based on gendered and sexualized assumptions itself embodies the masculinist and problematic materiality of hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy, and cisheteronormativity.

Reflecting on my past dating experiences, I could relate to Takumi's practice and how I have similarly followed the masculinist, cisheteronormative, and heterosexist performances in Japan. Before coming to the U.S., I remember whenever I go out for dates with women, I was almost always responsible for food, drinks, and entertainment expenses during the date. This is because I thought it was a *normal* attitude for men on the date to treat women and paying for food and drinks was one of the examples of how to perform a *good* man who is respectful and reliable. Simultaneously, it was culturally and socially expected and idealized behavior for men. During college, I started questioning "why do I have to always pay for women?" because my financial situation was tight with limited income from the part-time job I had at the time. But still, I continued to follow its norm anyway because I thought it was the right thing to do. I later realized the problematic gender norms and cisheteronormative performances attached to my acts by studying a critical approach to identity politics of gender and sexuality in U.S. graduate schools. Thus, reflecting on my uncritical and

168

problematic performances in relation to women in the heterosexual dating context, I assert

the pervasiveness of patriarchy, male supremacy, and cisheteronormativity that are

systematically and unconsciously ingrained in my experiences of growing up in Japanese

culture and society. In this way, I simultaneously relate to and problematize Takumi's

narrative and undergirded implications of gender and sexuality.

As he expressed this act is a strategy to match with people, his expectation is based

on his cishetero male assumption of a female gender norm that women are passive or may

appreciate/*like* (swipe-right) the act. Takumi's experience elucidates how gender norms are

deeply rooted in cisgender heterosexual romantic relationships as a prominent component.

However, in the online dating space, practices of gender norms can be complicated because

women are not obligated to appreciate or accept the act. Rather, they have the choice to

swipe left or right depending on their preferences. In this way, Takumi's choice of using this

act as a strategy to attract female users highlights how the systems of hegemonic masculinity,

patriarchy, cisheteronormativity, and capitalism are reified. Moreover, I problematize the

masculinist discourse of *nominication* and his act of buying drinks for women as the

materiality of cisheterosexism embedded in his everyday communications, denoting his

cisheteronormative views and class that uncritically enables this act as the norm/ideal in

heterosexual relationship contexts.

As many interviewees shared their intentional act of specifically revealing or

expressing their identity, sense, or value of being Japanese in their online dating profiles,

Takumi's explanation helps to understand why they have made the intentional effort. He

described that he initially did not specify his Japanese identity in his online dating profile.

However, he later realized that most people who he could match with were interested in

Japan or Japanese people. Hence, he started to explicitly mention his Japanese identity on the profile page as a matching strategy because he felt that being Japanese was well-received by non-Japanese women he had matched with in online dating. In this process of strategizing his online dating profile, he has developed his preference for the people with who he wants to be in romantic relationships to be the ones who are interested in Japan or have racial/ethnic preferences toward Japanese men. This is an important finding because their narratives insinuate historical and structural reasons why Japan or Japanese people are *well-received* by non-Japanese people in the U.S. Especially since WWII, Japan and the U.S. formally became allies by adopting a pacifist constitution, Japan-U.S. Mutual Security Treaty in 1951. This continuation of the Japan-U.S. alliance has a significant impact on everyday contexts and how the nation-state and nationality are perceived in each country. For example, Japanese people have relatively less restricted status in the U.S. immigration policies compared to other countries such as China and India. In 2021, the security treaty was renewed by both leaders (Prime Minister Suga and President Biden) reaffirming the peace, prosperity, and stability between Japan and the U.S. (U.S.-Japan Joint Leaders' Statement, 2021) Further promoting the diplomatic relationships, Japan and Japanese people are a *political ally* in the U.S. I argue these historical and structural reasons affect how Japan's nation-state and Japanese people are *well-received* in the U.S.

Teru reflected on the conversation he had with his current girlfriend who he met on an online dating app, "My current Hong Kong girlfriend, her family members like her mother and sisters love Japanese food and culture. She actually told me that might have been why she was interested in me at first." This is an interesting narrative because Teru is dating a Hong Kong (Asian) woman, not White or other women of color. As I listened to his

narrative, I instantly thought about the diplomatic relationships between Japan and Hong Kong. Hong Kong is considered as an extremely important economic partner for Japan through trading businesses. Especially, in everyday contexts, Japanese products dominate Hong Kong's popular culture scenes such as anime, cosmetics, groceries, cars, and more (Chen, 2017). Like the Japan-U.S. alliance, I assert that the closely tied economic partnership between Japan and Hong Kong affects how Japan and Japanese identity are perceived in Hong Kong. In this vein, Teru and his Hong Kong girlfriend's dating relationship alludes to the historical, structural, and political layers of inter/intra-Asian relationalities.

In further discussing inter/intra-Asian relationalities, Matt highlighted more explicitly his preferred racial/ethnic partners he wanted to match in online dating apps, as follows:

> [I prefer] someone who is either Japanese or Japanese American, that's definitely one of my priorities, I think. But I wasn't that selective, so, I wasn't thinking like it needs to be Japanese or Asian. But yeah, I did look for someone who has some common hobbies and things like that.

He specifically preferred Japanese, Japanese American, or Asian as a priority in seeking romantic relationships in online dating because he was looking for commonalities such as cultural values and practices within the Asian context. Although I argue commonalities communicated through the umbrella *Asian identity* is an essentializing discourse of Asian ethnicities, I understand how Matt views cultural values and practices shared by *Asians*. For example, I often have conversations with a Korean cisfemale friend and there are moments we frequently refer to Japanese and Korean cultural customs as *Asian values* that we commonly practice in everyday contexts. My Korean friend and I both understand the problematic essentialism working with the categorization of *Asian,* but we still recognize *we*

as *Asians* in our conversations, meaning that we understand or are aware of certain cultural meanings and attitudes that are commonly shared. In this way, I see the shared sense of being Asian and how it can be valued in finding commonalities through the racial category.

Similarly, Kouki also explained how he came to realize his racial/ethnic preference to be a Japanese woman in the online dating space. He shared his experience as follows:

You know, I'm already 33, so, of course, I want to be in a long-term relationship if there is a chance. But if I think about the long-term relationship and something like marriage, I actually prefer Japanese. So, if I have a chance to meet with Japanese, like if there are cute Japanese girls, I would really like to match with them. You know, I think the sense of values and also like the sense of humor can be shared if it's Japanese. I have dated Taiwanese, white American, and Turkish girls, but you know, something like laughing at the same time, being able to relate without the words to the music we used to listen to, and chatting about what kind of TV drama were there before, it's fun to do. So, I think this kind of feeling can only be experienced with Japanese people based on my experiences of dating foreign women. And the environment they grew up in is another deciding factor, like, I can relate to and talk with them about many things if they grew up in the same culture as me. I feel it that way, so, thinking about the long-term relationship and marriage, I prefer Japanese for now.

In addition to the interviewees' self-presentation and matching strategy in the online dating profile, Matt and Kouki's preferences for long-term relationships are ethnically Japanese women because having an appreciation of common sense and cultural values is a key to maintaining and cultivating the relationships. Kouki is specifically exclusive to Japanese

172

women in his preference because he thinks there are things that can only be shared among Japanese people such as the sense of humor and cultural experiences from growing up in Japan. In these narratives, I assert Japaneseness (e.g., Japanese exceptionalism and ethnocentrism) communicated through their ethnic preference for Japanese. Kouki's preference denotes the uniqueness and cultural values that are exclusive to Japanese ethnicity and being Japanese became an essential factor for him to cultivate long-term relationships. This means, the goal of online dating for Kouki (i.e., developing long-term relationships and eventually getting married) is not attainable with non-Japanese female users because of his preferences guided by Japaneseness. Matt also considers Japanese ethnicity as one of the priorities, but at the same time, he thinks being Asian means there are some commonalities of interests.

Similarly, Kuma described his racial/ethnic preference in online dating in a broader sense, as follows:

> From a cultural perspective, when selecting women in online dating, I think it would be a No. 1 advantage in coexisting if there are Asian identities or cultures in them because there are overlaps of parts that we are alike. You know, because there are many cultural differences and diversity in the U.S.

As illustrated through their narratives, the significance of their self-identity as Japanese has affected their choice or preference of who they want to match or meet in the online dating space. In their experiences, being Japanese was used as a strategy, strong/selling point, and uniqueness to stand out in the online dating market where they have to *compete* with other men. Simultaneously, their sense of being Japanese has been shaped and developed by the interactions with women who they matched on online dating apps. Because interviewees

noticed that most people who they could match were interested in Japan or Japanese people, they gained self-consciousness/awareness about the importance of specifically expressing their identity as Japanese in order to have better chances of getting matches in online dating apps.

Teru further shared his racial preference in online dating that he does not want to match with Black women, as follows:

> I can't say this out loud in the current U.S. but based on my past experiences, I hesitate to marry a Black woman, honestly … When I was an elementary school student, I had a hafu friend whose mother was Japanese and father was a [American] military man. But he was bullied throughout elementary and middle school time. I've seen that situation besides him for six or more years, so I honestly don't want my (future) child to experience that, you know. So, I don't want to select a Black woman when it comes to marriage. Other than that, I don't have any preferences whether they are Asians or Caucasians.

This narrative highlights the dominant ideology of Japaneseness, Japan's homogenizing discourse of race and social issues regarding hafu (i.e., mix-race/ethnic) identity. With racial purity as the status quo, his friend from the elementary school had consistently been bullied because of his mixed-race identity. Simultaneously, this is not simply about racial purity but also the relationality between Japanese identity and anti-blackness. Moreover, I assert this relationality is the materiality of Japaneseness working with white supremacy and anti-blackness.

The historical construction of Japaneseness is closely connected to Japan's nation-state and nationalism in relation to Asian countries and the U.S./Western contexts.

Japaneseness emerged as a new nationalist discourse after the Meiji restoration with the intention of strengthening Japan's imperial forces to be the hegemony of Asia and promoting industrialization to compete with the U.S./Western countries. In this vein, Japaneseness is closely tied to whiteness and white supremacy in discursive practices of the colonial matrix of power. For example, Japaneseness established the differentiation between the dominant *white* Japanese and other Asian ethnicities and ethnic minorities in Japan, inducing ethnocentrism and exceptionalism associated with Japanese identity. Moreover, aspiration towards the dominant *white* U.S./Western values is engrained as the ideal or standard in constituting Japaneseness through social institutions such as education, family, workplace, politics, and more. This is no exception to racism and anti-blackness persistently happening in Japanese society. In June 2020, NHK broadcasted a program in response to Black Lives Matter, featuring an animated video to explain the historical and current context of racism in the U.S. This coverage garnered severe criticism because the animated video depicted Black people with racist images such as exaggerated muscles and angry faces with looters in the background (Illmer, 2020). These neutralized offensive/insensitive images of Black people are historically cultivated through anti-blackness in Japan (e.g., the historical continuum of blackface since the 19th century). However, the coverage of issues of racism in public discourse is often focused on xenophobia against Chinese and Koreans and anti-blackness in Japan is continuously invisible or not thoroughly discussed (Illmer, 2020).

Closely reading his narrative, a specific tension against the Black race reveals Japan's ongoing racial discrimination, anti-blackness persisting in society because he does not have any hesitation with the racial mixture between the Asian and White race. As I was listening to his narrative, I thought about hafu Black female Japanese such as Ariana Miyamoto (Miss

Universe Japan 2015) and Naomi Osaka (professional tennis player) who were criticized by the dominant *white* Japanese that they are *not Japanese* or *not Japanese enough* because of their mixedness and blackness. They are examples of Japaneseness working with exclusionist and masculinist discourses. Moreover, in his narrative, the cisheteronormative ideas of marriage and reproduction are assumed. This means, the ideas of getting married, having a child, and becoming a father in the future is already a *normal* part of his life plan. Hence, Teru's racial preference in online dating not only does illuminate the sociohistorical contexts of Japaneseness and Japan's racial issues but also elucidates imbalanced systems of gender and sexuality reifying cisheteronormativity.

### *Japanese Pride*

Related to the significance of Japanese identity in their online dating experiences, some interviewees made direct connections to Japan's nationalism – how they feel proud of being Japanese. Joe frequently mentioned that "I'm proud of being Japanese" in the interview. Through the conversation with Joe, he also reflected that his occupation as Japan's Self-Defense Force (JSDF) may have been boosting his pride and patriotism for the nation and national identity. Frühstück (2007) examined masculinity within modern JSDF that unlike the soldiers of the former Imperial Army, JSDF constructs the militarized masculinity around pacifism, the mission to protect and support the civilian population without aggressiveness in contributing to war. While Japan's militarism and imperialism instigated wrongful wars with countless casualties and sufferings in other Asian countries, a handful of conservative people still believe that those wars were led by *jiei jison no seishin* (自衛自尊の精神 [the spirit of the holy war of self-defense and survival]) in relation to western military expansion and economic restoration. Dalton (2022) connected this modern JSDF's

176

work of *protection* continue to maintain patriarchal gender norms and cisheteronormativity. She challenged the suppressed facts about gender inequality and sexism persisting in JSDF in order to protect the popularity of soldiers as future husbands for women. Thus, as a cisgender heterosexual Japanese man, Joes' identity as a soldier of JSDF is associated with hegemonic masculinity and ongoing issues of patriarchal gender norms, sexism, and cisheteronormativity.

Comparing his experiences of living in Japan and the U.S., he expressed that he became to think that Japan is a better nation than the U.S. after moving to the U.S. Here, I reinsert the materiality of Japaneseness, connecting his transnational experiences as a member of JSDF with strengthened patriotism and ethnocentrism. He shared his experience of traveling to a historic city in the U.S., as follows:

It doesn't mean that I dislike America and I actually think America is cool, but I still think Japan is better by seeing the sloppy characters of America … I've been to a city where it is famous for being one of the most historical locations to visit. My friends really recommended visiting there too, so I went there. But you know, the history they are talking about is only about 250 years, after all. I was like, wait Americans, it surely is an old city but Japan is a different scale … We have our emperor for over 2000 years you know.

In his explanation, he expressed his pride in Japan for having a long national history than the U.S. He also described the national character of the U.S. as sloppy by feeling the gap of how the U.S. American people think the duration of 250 years is historically significant. Here, it is important to emphasize that the (national) history and nationalism are closely interconnected to shape the ways of national/ist thinking and the ideas of the nation-state. As Saaler (2016)

underscored the relationship between Japanese history and nationalism, "the question of whether the nation (or nation-state) has a venerable history – or, by contrast, is a modern construct – has grown directly out of the prominence given to history in national/ist thinking" (p. 1). Thus, national history is a core factor in formulating nationalism. Moreover, this national/ist thinking is also a gender and sexuality discourse because patriarchy and cisheteronormativity are still dominant ideologies affecting Japanese people's everyday experiences. Joe's articulation of the national character of the U.S. as *sloppy* associated with history denotes his nationalistic thinking, the underlined masculinist implication of Japanese superiority/pride, ethnocentrism, and the patriarchal system. This also applies to other interviewees' perspectives about the value of Japanese identity such as the universality of *dotoku* or *tokuiku*, harmony, homogeneity, and patriotism which is unique and exceptional quality in living in the U.S. and participating in online dating apps.

Moreover, Teru addressed his feelings in addition to his previous articulation of calling himself a patriot, as follows:

> In any way, I take pride in being Japanese and that is definitely non-negotiable …
> Also, I think in the future world and globalization, only being culturally self-centered
> and not helping each other, like the U.S. and China, would not go well. So, I think
> you'll be an ultimate businessman and human being if you have the spirit of
> hospitality and reciprocity such as Japanese values in addition to a self-centered
> mind.

In his expressions, he situates *Japanese values* such as hospitality and reciprocity are the key to people's well-being in the future global world. I emphasize again that the masculinist discourse of Japaneseness, ethnocentrism, and exceptionalism are communicated through his

national/ist thinking. Connecting Teru and other interviewees' identities, I highlight their

cisheteromale Japanese egos are working with Japaneseness, their sense/values of being

cisgender heterosexual Japanese. In Teru's narrative, he described his image of a national

characteristic of China and the U.S. as *self-centered* and he thinks it is a part of the

component in further embracing the Japanese values. Here, to discuss the Japanese pride that

emerged as interviewees' implicit/explicit value, it is important to underscore the historical

context of Japanese nationalism and the materiality of Japaneseness. Specifically, I assert the

historicity of Japanese exceptionalism which is a masculinist and exclusionary construct.

This notion is often studied as the Japanese version of American exceptionalism and

explained as its quality as "hospitable and embracing to non-Japanese cultures," (Tajima &

Thornton, 2022, p. 29) which aligns with Teru's perspectives about Japanese values in

relation to non-Japanese cultures. Moreover, a national characteristic of non-Japanese

cultural Others such as China and the U.S. was described in a simplistic or homogenous way

which needs to be problematized. Thus, Teru's feeling about Japanese pride embodies the

discursive effects and homogenizing discourse of Japaneseness and I challenge the

essentialized and normalized understandings of masculinist constructs such as nationalism,

patriarchy, and cisheteronormativity.

He further expanded on the understanding of his pride in being Japanese by attending

to the historical context of Japanese society that informs the quality of being Japanese, as

follows:

I think this way of thinking is engrained in childhood education and as a part of our

DNA. I want to be a human who embraces the quality of helping each other rather

than the way of living like just focusing on myself. And I think those kinds of humans

will be the leaders in the world. So, I've been thinking that I want to cherish the spirit

and spiritual qualities like hospitality, cooperation, and compassion that Japanese

people may have the most compared to Americans and even the people from other

countries who don't have those kinds of qualities much. If you think about it, in the

age of Prince Shotoku (聖徳太子) around the 600s, about 1400 years ago, Japan was

the country in which the word of *wa* (和) became the Japanese constitution. That way,

I think it's already a part of our DNA and I think we can be proud of it.

The concept of *wa* (和 [literally, harmony]) appeared in the first written constitution of

Japan, Prince Shotoku's (聖徳太子) Seventeen Article Constitution issued in 604 which

became a huge factor in popularizing this concept as the moral or ethical value of Japanese

people and now it is largely known as *wa no seishin* (和の精神 [literally, the spirit of

harmony]) in today's Japan. It appeared in the first article saying, "Harmony should be

valued and quarrels should be avoided" (Aston, 1968, p. 128). Teru reflected that this spirit

of *wa* has been embedded and engrained, for example, by learning such values at school from

an early age. In contemporary Japan's Basic Education Law, harmony is a primary concept

and mentality for fostering human growth and well-being, ethics, and global competence

(Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, n.d.). I also argue that the

idea of *wa no seishin* seems a gender-less construct; however, its origin is rooted in

Confucianism which sustains patriarchal ideologies. Thus, Teru's remark of *wa no seishin*

exemplifies Japan's sustained imbalanced gender system and patriarchal structures.

Another narrative from Kuma also elucidates the historical context of Japanese

nationalism and Japaneseness. He shared his experience and perspective, as follows:

For some reason, I've been told that my appearance is similar to Korean people. In the U.S., I have also been spoken to by other people in Korean … I know I cannot say this, but I hate to be misidentified as a Korean person. You know, I have many Korean friends and I like Korean culture. But I don't like Korea as a country. So, of course, I think there may be at least some people who also dislike Korea in terms of the country itself and national characteristics. So, to me, I don't like to be categorized as Korean. I don't like to be recognized in the same category as Korean. Because of the political aspect, I don't want to be negatively perceived by others.

Here, Kuma's expressions demonstrate the ideological impact of diplomatic relationships between Japan and Korea on his impressions of Korea. This is an important finding because if the online dating users do not know much about the ongoing tensions between Japan and Korea nor have anti-Korean racism, the images of Korean identity may actually be quite contrary to Kuma's impression given the rapid expansion of internationally renowned Korean popular culture (e.g., K-pop, TV dramas, and movies). Korean stars, artists, and media production such as BTS, Psy, *Parasite*, and *Squid Game* have been garnering global attention and well-received by the domestic and international audience, becoming a *cultural juggernaut* (Sang-Hun, 2021). Hence, a modern, cool, and stylish branding of Korea and Korean identity have been developed in the global public (Kim, 2022). Thus, Kuma's impression specifically highlights how the historical and political discourses of Japan-Korea relations affected his understanding of race, ethnicity, and nationality, which is communicated through his Japanese identity.

Specifically, the anti-Korean sentiment in today's Japan has been heightened through the historical and political issues regarding the territory of the Takeshima islands, the comfort

system, and the Fukushima nuclear power plant. Oh and Han (2022) unpacked the anti-Korean sentiment in Japan through Japaneseness working as Japanese exceptionalism or ethnonationalism and a justification of colonial dominance within Japan and across Asia. They underscored how *zainichi* (在日 [literally, ethnic Korean residing in Japan]) people have been systematically discriminated against in Japan in a variety of contexts such as immigration laws, housing, education, and employment. As Kuma said "I don't want to be negatively perceived by others" by being identified as a Korean, his negative connotation to Korea reifies the political tensions of Japan-Korea relationships and the historical continuum of Japaneseness, the superiority of Japan over Korea induced by homogeneity and exclusionary discourse of Japanese nationalism.

Moreover, it is important to examine how Kuma said he likes Korean culture but dislikes Korea as a country. This contradiction point to the nuances of Japan's postcolonial and masculinist discourses and multiculturalism in relation to Korea. Specifically, it communicates Japan's historical relationships with Korea – colonization and war through Japan's imperialism. To name a memorable moment, political tensions between Japan and Korea have been heightened whenever Japan's political leaders visit Yasukuni Shrine since the first visitation by the former prime minister, Junichiro Koizumi (小泉純一郎; 2001-2006) (Kawamura & Iwabuchi, 2022). Because Yasukuni Shrine is a Shinto shrine where the souls/spirits of war criminals are enshrined, political leaders' visitation to Yasukuni Shrine means Japan's unapologetic validation of war crimes that had happened during WWII. Anti-Korean sentiment in Japan has been heightened in response to the severe criticism by the Korean government and people against the visitation of Yasukuni Shrine (Kawamura & Iwabuchi, 2022). I assert that Kuma's dislike of the Korean country highlights the historical

and political background of Japan-Korea diplomatic relations. Simultaneously, Kuma practices what Oh and Han (2022) highlighted as the problematic logic of "superficial, neoliberal multiculturalism" (p. 54) that celebrates diversity but rejects structural-level discussion of power dynamics. In Kuma's case, he embraces diversity in his personal-level relationships with Korean friends and cultures. But simultaneously, his hate towards the country of Korea exemplifies the absence of structural-level discussion about the historical and political stigma associated with the dominant discourse of Japanese exceptionalism and Japaneseness. Moreover, the dominant discourse of Japanese exceptionalism works with cisheterosexism; however, implications of gender and sexuality remain hidden.

Matt also disclosed the potential impact of explicitly writing his Japanese identity in his dating profile, as follows:

> Even though I was open, so like, I didn't mind if my match would be with a Korean person or Chinese person or anyone. But I'm not sure the other side like, when a Korean woman saw my message and found out I'm Japanese and immediately she wasn't interested in me because the *racial differences*, and then immediately I didn't get the response back. That may have happened for sure. (emphasis added)

Here, I highlight the undergirded sociohistorical and political assumptions affecting Matt's self-evaluation of Korean women. Moreover, within the heterosexual online dating context, I interpret his insecurity of masculinity associated with historical and political tensions between Japan and Korea. His narrative also communicates what Oh and Han (2022) argued about neoliberal multiculturalism. Matt says he does not mind dating Korean and Chinese women in online dating but still, he is aware of resistance and rejection based on the diplomatic relations at the structural level. Related to Kuma's impression of Korea and

183

Korean identity, Matt specifically imagined the possibility of being rejected by Korean women because of his Japanese identity. While he is not sure if this has actually happened when he was participating in online dating apps, he is aware of the ongoing political tensions in Japan-Korea relations and the anti-Japanese sentiment that also persists in Korea, which affect the way he perceives Korean women in the online dating space. Moreover, his particular expression of *racial difference* instead of saying *ethnic difference* insinuates the hegemonic construction of Japanese as a race through the homogenizing and exclusionary discourse of Japaneseness. He unconsciously considers Japanese a racial category, differentiating Japanese identity from other Asian ethnicities.

### *Cool Japan*

In further unpacking Japanese nationalism, I maintain that the expressed significance of being Japanese and Japanese pride by interviewees are sustained by the national project of *cool Japan*. In this section, I look into how Japan's political project of *cool Japan* affects interviewees' online dating experiences. Many interviewees shared their experiences that women they have matched on online dating apps told them that they like Japanese anime and manga. On this note, Joe mentioned that "Generally, women who tell me that they like Japan means they like Japanese anime. Many of them are exposed to Japanese culture through anime. Then, they like Japan." Takumi also said that when he was looking for friendships through the apps, he was extremely popular with women who like anime, manga, and Japan. In Matt's experience, he was once stalked by a Caucasian woman through an online dating app. I asked him how he felt about being stalked and he answered, as follows:

> Still okay, you know, she likes Japanese culture in the U.S. So, that's nice … but you
> do wonder though, because there are many people who just like, you know, anime

and things like that. And that's how they like Japan. So maybe that's why she's

interested in Japan because of that influence. And not so much of like, who I am, as a

Japanese person.

This is a very important narrative in discussing the issues of sexual harassment in the online

dating space. The existing critical scholarship about sexual violence and harassment in online

dating are largely focused on women's suffering experiences as victims. Those studies are

extremely imperative because cismale privilege and superiority must be continuously

challenged and marginalized voices need to be heard in advocating for social justice and

equality. However, Matt's narrative illuminated the case of how women can harass men

which is often overlooked, disrupting the binary vector of *men harassing women*.

Like other interviewees who found out that their matches tend to like Japan or

Japanese people because of the influence of anime and manga, Matt also found the similarity

in the woman who stalked him on the online dating app. However, he did not mind much

about the fact that he was being stalked, instead, he was concerned because he felt that the

reason why the woman *liked* him on the app was not that she liked his personality or who he

is. Rather, she simply liked Japanese culture such as anime. Here, I problematize how Matt's

experience of being stalked by a woman became an oblivious part of his narrative. Even

when I asked how he felt about being stalked, he did not go into detail about how he felt.

Rather, he focused on how this woman liked Japanese culture. I view this as the insecurity of

his masculinity through the act of sharing the fact and feelings of being sexually harassed by

a woman. I relate to my own experiences of being sexually harassed by women and gay men

in the past that I could not share those experiences with others for a long time. I still have not

shared such experiences even with my family and I realize that I let those experiences be

oblivious, meaning I literally stop thinking about them like they never happened. As I reflect on my experiences connecting to Matt's narrative, I see myself trying to protect my (hegemonic) masculinity, the desire to stay strong and refuse to admit the experiences of sexual harassment. In this way, I assert the maintenance of masculinity insinuated by Matt's narrative and affect in response to his experience.

As one of the strategies in creating the online dating profile, Joe explained that he personally does not like anime but he intentionally writes that he loves anime in his profile in order to match with women on the apps. He said, as follows:

Because they (women who matched) usually like anime, I emphasize that I love anime [in my profile]. Then, many times I've had experiences of the conversations gettting hyped up. So, even I don't like NARUTO -ナルト- at all and I don't know anything about it, I just say "Isn't NARUTO -ナルト- such a good anime? I love it."

Therefore, for Joe's online dating experiences, expressing his appreciation for anime in his profile is an important strategy in getting attention and being able to match with others. This is because he found that the act of appreciating anime is well-received by other users in online dating. Even if he does not like anime, saying he likes anime in his profile would attract other users which can be a starting point for relationship-building. This is based on how Japanese soft power such as anime and manga became a cultural juggernaut in the global market. Hence, it became an effective strategy for Japanese men to use as an additional valuable quality of their identity.

With the advent of technology and new media networks, Japanese popular culture such as anime, games, music, and movies has been increasingly accessible to Western countries since the 1960s (McLelland, 2017). Specifically, the box office success of the

recent anime films based on manga such as *Demon Slayer: The Mugen Train* (劇場版「鬼滅の刃」無限列車編) and *Jujutsu Kaisen 0* (劇場版 呪術廻戦 0 ) in the U.S. demonstrates the mainstream audience in the global context. As Williams and Zenger (2012) stressed, popular culture is an impactful resource, especially for young people "to perform identities and make meaning in their own lives" (p. 3). Thus, popular culture is also an essential element for online dating users to perform and make sense of their identities and interactions with others which affect their ways of self-presentation and relationship building.

Since the early 2000s, the Japanese government has been investing in Japan's *soft power* and promoting the national brand image of *cool Japan* (e.g., Matsui, 2014; McLelland, 2017). The notion of *soft power* is referred to as the ways one's demand, appreciation for, or attraction to a nation's culture that can also promote the broader political agenda and project of the nation (Nye, 1990). *Cool Japan* is what Iwabuchi (2010) terms *brand nationalism*, a Japanese government's marketing strategy to bolster cultural imperialism by using soft power. According to the Cabinet Office website, they explain the *cool Japan* strategy, as follows:

> [T]he "charm" of Japan, which is regarded by the world as "cool" … [and] strengthen Japan's soft power by increasing the brand power of Japan and increasing the number of foreigners (Japanese fans) who have an affection for Japan by gaining "sympathy" from around the world. (Cabinet Office, 2019, para. 1)

This national project carries the historical continuum of Japaneseness, Japanese exceptionalism promoting the brand of *cool* Japan – more specifically, developing images of the nation as "more 'liberated' and 'humane'" than other countries, particularly within Asia (Iwabuchi, 2010, p. 72). Thus, the *Cool Japan* project reinserts the hegemonic power of

Japan in the global context. This Japanese government's political agenda of investing in soft power to (re)brand Japan's nation-state appeared in the interviewees' consciousness to the power of anime and manga influences in their online dating experiences. Simultaneously, their understandings of Japan's soft power are confirmed by the people who they have matched. Moreover, the exceptional and superior *cool* images of Japan are communicated through Teru and Kuma's narratives of comparing the nation's value/quality with other countries such as China, Korea, and the U.S. In this vein, interviewees' experiences reify the larger national project of Japan which sustains and reinforces their sense of being Japanese, Japanese pride, and exceptionalism in the online dating space.

But simultaneously, Miller (2017) offered an academic interpretation of Japanese popular culture and asserted that the consumption of *cool Japan* through Japanese anime and manga is "narrowly androcentric" (p. 57). Because the representation of anime and manga are often considered as simply fantasy or entertainment, it often lacks critical analyses of discourses on gender and sexuality. Moreover, feminist and critical scholarship of Japanese anime or manga often receive pushback from fans because they continuously want to enjoy the contents without critically thinking about gender and sexual ideologies represented in anime and manga (Miller, 2017). For example, both male and female bodies are often hypersexualized in and across a variety of anime/manga genres. Male bodies are often depicted as hypermasculine, independent, and female bodies are often hyperfeminized and dependent on men which also promote gender/sexual norms and expectations. However, under the political branding of *cool Japan*, anime and manga have been culturally accepted and appreciated as the *cool* quality of Japanese culture without problematizing the media representations and national ideologies. Thus, the interviewees' narratives exemplify the

ideological impact of Japan's soft power and *cool Japan* as a national project in the online dating space. Closely reading their narratives, I argue that the uncritical views of what is *cool* about Japan must be critically interrogated with gender and sexuality discourses.

### *Reflective Summary*

In this second theme, *Feeling Proud: Japanese Exceptionalism and Nationalism in Online Dating* looked into how the interviewees' understandings of their identities and self-presentations elucidate the broader national/istic discourses, and vice versa in the online dating context. Specifically examining the cisgender U.S.-based Japanese men's experiences of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and nationality in the online dating space, their narratives illuminated the significance of expressing the value/sense of Japanese identity in online dating profiles. They are self-conscious about using their identity of being Japanese to be intentionally highlighted in their dating profiles as one of the strategies to attract potential matches in online dating apps. Moreover, the significance of being Japanese emerged as the most salient factor in constituting their identity through their everyday experiences. Through my analysis of their personal narratives, I find their sense of membership as Japanese men in the U.S. as well as engrained nationalistic ideologies in strategizing their presentations in online dating apps.

By looking into the significance of their senses/values of being Japanese, their narratives elucidated how they take pride in their Japanese identity in interacting with the people around them in the online dating space. For example, it is apparent in their preferences of who they want(ed) to meet in online dating apps. Many interviewees expressed that they prefer meeting with women who are interested in Japan or Japanese culture. More specifically, their racial/ethnic preferences for Japanese, or more broadly Asian

women, were emphasized by Kouki, Kuma, and Matt's narratives because they highly value the experience of being able to share cultural practices, sensitivity, and ethics associated with racial/ethnic identities. Moreover, the quality of being Japanese is often described as a superior human value compared to other countries such as China and the U.S.

Subsequently, their narratives revealed the underlining Japan's national/ist project and exceptionalism which showcase the historical continuum of Japaneseness. Specifically, Teru's self-presentation of *100% pure Japanese* in his profile exemplifies Japan's historical construction of homogeneity and racial/ethnic purity as the status quo. Moreover, Kuma and Matt's narratives demonstrated Japanese nationalism and exceptionalism by acknowledging the anti-Korean sentiment that may affect their online dating experiences. Kouki, Matt, and Teru's narratives made important connections as to how the (national) history plays a crucial role in promoting nationalism and branding the nation-state itself. Throughout the history of the Japanese constitution (i.e., the spirit of *wa*) and education (i.e., *dotoku* and *tokuiku*), the exceptional sense/value of being Japanese has been engrained as a core factor for evaluating human quality.

Further, the national project of *cool Japan* strategy, using Japan's soft power to promote nationalism was evident in the interviewees' experiences. They underscored how anime and manga are significant elements for matching with others in online dating apps. Aligning with their preference of seeking cisgender women who are interested in Japan or Japanese culture, they intentionally use their appreciation for anime and manga as a strategic tool to sell themselves in the online dating space. But simultaneously, as McLelland (2017) and Miller (2017) offered their academic interpretations of Japan's soft power, the *cool Japan* strategy obscures or conceals ongoing issues of gender/sexuality systems in Japan.

Thus, under the first theme of *Feeling Proud: Japanese Exceptionalism and Nationalism in Online Dating*, interviewees' personal experiences and narratives in online dating contexts allowed me to read the broader structural-level ideologies and discourses that affect their everyday communications. Moreover, it is important to reiterate that the interviewees' narratives in this theme also persistently communicated their (unmarked) cismale heterosexual privilege and cisheteronormativity in the online dating context.

**Feeling Transnational: Shifting Identities in Online Dating**

In this theme, I document and analyze Japanese men's experiences of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality as transnational subjects living in a liminal space between Japan and the U.S. Specifically, I engage with interviewees' understandings of their social identities and online dating experiences in order to illuminate their positionalities within the spectrum of privilege and marginalization.

*Reflexive Relationships with Interviewees*

Throughout the interview, I asked interviewees questions related to their social identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. For example, some questions asked to interviewees were: What is *race* in your understanding, how does race impact your online dating experiences, do you think race is an important factor for achieving your goals in online dating, has the idea of *race* ever changed after coming to the U.S.? Similar questions were asked for collecting their experiences of gender and sexuality as well.

Importantly, for all interviewees, I had to briefly introduce and explain the meaning of *social identity* before asking these questions. Because some interviewees asked me "社会的アイデンティティって何ですか？ (What is social identity?)," I provided a prompt, as follows:

When we live in society, there are social categories that determine who we are. For example, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality are your social identities. I am going to ask questions about these social identities and how those are related to your online dating experiences.

This process of providing the meaning and explanation of social identity itself denotes how *shakaiteki identity* (社会的アイデンティティ [literally, social identity]) is an unfamiliar word, notion, and/or ideology that is not used or applied in interviewees' everyday contexts. Moreover, many interviewees had difficulty answering questions about their identities such as race, gender, and sexuality. When the questions of race, gender, and sexuality are asked, they said "それは難しい質問ですね (that's a difficult question)" and "哲学的な質問だな (that's a philosophical question)." For example, when I asked Teru about his understanding of race, he expressed, "That [question] is hard. I've never thought about it." In responding to the question of gender, Yusuke said, "This is quite difficult, I'm not sure how to express it." Takumi also responded to the question about sexuality, as follows:

Before coming to the U.S., I had never come across the moment to think about sexuality. In Japan, homosexual people are a super minority, so I didn't have any moment of questioning myself like "Am I also?" But when I came to the U.S., I had moments of questioning "how about myself?" because there are many women and homosexual men in my [current] workplace.

Takuya highlighted that he has never thought about his sexuality when he was living in Japan. After coming to the U.S., he became aware of the idea of sexuality and sexual minorities because there were more visibility and opportunities to interact with sexual minorities in his workplace. Matt also responded that "I didn't think about [my gender and

192

sexual identity] that much on online dating. I just try to think who I am and just talk about who I am, that was me." This is literally their privilege as cisgender heterosexual men living within the dominant systems of gender and sexuality. While they answered the questions, some interviewees sometimes checked with me, "am I answering your question?" Here, interviewees were often uncertain or unaware of the idea of social identity itself and/or how to express and discuss race, gender, and sexuality. As represented their feelings of having difficulty answering questions about race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, I emphasize interviewees' (unmarked) privilege communicated through their reflections.

For racial/ethnic identity, their sense of being Japanese is intentionally self-expressed and showcased through their online dating profiles as illustrated in the first theme. However, when they were asked about their understandings of racial/ethnic identity, they stumbled. Here, the fact that they had difficulty answering the question of race denotes their privilege of being the dominant Japanese (e.g., what Teru calls "100% pure Japanese"), the privilege of not having to critically reflect on their identity within the homogenizing discourse of race in Japan. Through the historical constitution of Japaneseness, Japan's racial homogeneity (i.e., Japan as a country with one race) has been the dominant belief which also fosters nationalistic purity as the status quo (Akagawa, 2014; Yamaguchi, 2020). Among the interviewees, all of them identified themselves as Japanese, implying they are not hafu/mixed Japanese nor ethnic minorities. While Japan consists of ethnic diversity including native/indigenous, large numbers of Chinese and Korean descent, the assortment of other Asian and Western ethnicities, and an increasing population of mixed-race/ethnic Japanese, ethnically *pure* Japanese people are considered as the dominant population in today's Japan

(Kawai, 2015). In this vein, being ethnically *pure* Japanese positions one in the majority and privileged position.

Importantly, being the dominant Japanese with their cisgender and heterosexual identity denotes (unmarked) cisheteronormative privilege. When interviewees shared their narratives with regard to their online dating experiences, cisheteronormativity is consistently reified and embodied throughout. For example, ideas of binary thinking, patriarchy, marriage, and reproduction are continuously expressed as the norm or ideal in their narratives. When they mention their desire or life plan to get married as one of the goals of participating in online dating apps, their cisheteronormative privileges are not challenged. Speaking of marriage, Japan's marriage law makes a heterosexual couple to have the same surname. Oftentimes, women are the ones who are socially expected to change their names. This is a heterosexist law regulating women's rights. In addition, gay marriage has not been legalized in Japan. These marginalities are unmarked within their privileged voices, and their voices are coming from their positionality as the dominant Japanese (i.e., cisgender, heterosexual, middle-class, and pure Japanese).

Another reason that the interviewee had difficulty answering the question of race/ethnicity is the ambiguity associated with the distinction between Japan's notions of race and ethnicity. In fact, although they explicitly self-identified as Japanese through the interview and their presentation on the online dating profiles, the notions of race and ethnicity were not clearly communicated in their narratives. Rather, interviewees simply used the term *nihonjin* (日本人 [literally, *nihon* as Japan and *jin* as human]) to identify themselves. As Kawai (2015) underscored, Japanese people, in general, describe themselves

as simply *nihonjin* instead of calling Japanese *jinshu* (人種 [literally, race]) or *minzoku* (民族 [ethnicity]).

Japan's notions of *jinshu* and *minzoku* consist of culturally specific meanings and are interconnected with the discourse of Japaneseness which is also a masculinist construct (Kawai, 2015). The concept of *jinshu* emerged in the last 19th century with the influence of Western understanding of *race*. However, *jinshu* was not used as Japanese people as a whole. It was used to differentiate between *civilized* Japanese and *uncivilized* minority ethnic groups in Japan such as Ainu and Okinawans. With the universalized idea of the white race as the most advanced or civilized race, Japan used *jinshu* as "the white race in its own racial hierarchy" (Kawai, 2015, p. 28). In this vein, the homogenous belief/myth of the Japanese as a race insinuates the internal racial hierarchy within the Japanese society. This historically and culturally specific construction of *jinshu* strategically maintains the hegemonically masculine nation-state within Asian countries.

The concept of *minzoku* was created and popularized to promote Japan's imperial nation-state within Asia. It was used to differentiate Japanese people from other Asian ethnicities and position Japan as the hegemony of Asia (Kawai, 2015; Sekimoto, 2014). Therefore, Japanese notions of *jinshu* (race) and *minzoku* (ethnicity) have culturally specific meanings that are different from Western notions of race and ethnicity. Moreover, Japan as a homogenous nation and the quality of the Japanese race in relation to other races/ethnicities have widely circulated through the education system and everyday discourses endorsed by the government (Okano & Tsuneyoshi, 2011). The interviewees' use of *nihonjin* to call themselves and their difficulty in articulating their understandings of race/ethnicity elucidate Japan's historical construction and absence of discourses on race and ethnicity in everyday

contexts. This is also a gender and sexuality discourse because as cisgender heterosexual men in Japan, they did not have to challenge their own identity in addition to their race/ethnicity of being *nihonjin.*

On a different note, Kuma shared his understanding of race by providing an example of his perception of Black people, as follows:

At first, I thought Black people are a bit scary based on their looks, so, I used to hesitate to talk to them … my impression at the beginning was Black people are scary and I had a prejudice against them. But when I was in the U.S. college, one of my Black classmates taught me a math problem that I had a hard time solving. So, even though their appearance is kind of shallow and stern, I became friends with Black people after I realized this [Black] race has a character of kindness too.

Kuma's narrative illustrates the stereotypes and prejudices pertaining to the Black race that Black people are *scary*, *shallow*, and *stern*. He feared Black people because of the violent characteristics associated with black phenotypes, hypermasculine traits (LaPollo et al., 2014). Because of these images, he hated Black people. However, after coming to the U.S. and directly interacting with Black people around him, his perception of Black people has changed. This narrative exemplifies Japan's ongoing anti-Black sentiment as well as the dominant discourse of Japaneseness in maintaining the racial hierarchy between the Japanese race and the Black race (Fujino, 2008; Russell, 1996). This power structure is also evident through Teru's previous narrative of how he does not desire Black women as potential romantic/sexual partners in online dating. He does not want a hafu child of Japanese and Black because of Japan's ongoing racism against Black hafu Japanese and Black people in general. Moreover, coming from his cismale heterosexual identity, his preference for non-

196

Black women denotes cisheteronormativity and sexism associated with prejudice and nationalism. These racial prejudices anchored by Japaneseness are constructed through their privileged positionalities of being Japanese cisgender heterosexual men.

For gender and sexual identity, what I find particularly interesting in interviewees' responses is the ambiguity between gender and sexuality. There were oftentimes when I asked questions about their understandings of gender or masculinity and they responded with implications of (hetero)sexuality, and vice versa. For example, Takumi answered to a question about sexuality by starting his response as "I don't feel that I'm a masculine man." Then, he explained how he came to reaffirm his heterosexuality by being surrounded by many women and coworkers who are homosexual in his workplace. While the relationships between sex, gender, and sexuality are closely connected and cannot be separated, the ambiguity of gender/sexuality that emerged from their responses denotes their (unmarked) privileged positionality of not having to challenge their being of a cisgender and heterosexual male within the systems of patriarchy and cisheteronormativity.

Kouki answered when I asked if his idea of *otoko rashisa* (masculinity) has ever changed since he came to the U.S., as follows:

> A way of thinking [about masculinity], yes, I have changed. Of course, in this day and age, I understand the diversity in sexuality. I've lived in the U.S. South, North/South Carolina, and Florida, and I recently moved to Massachusetts. But I thought Massachusetts is much more liberal and there are many *douseiai* (同性愛 [literally, homosexual]) couples. As I see the people I actually know who are *douseiai*, I realized there are many forms of sexuality and romantic love. So, now I accept that without any resistance … I feel I got used to it.

In his narrative, he started by saying his idea of masculinity has changed since he moved to the U.S. Then, he shifted the focus to sexuality. He further explained how his understandings of sexuality became more diverse by moving from relatively conservative states to a liberal state. His narrative itself illuminates how space/place has been an important factor to be aware of diversity in sexual orientations and identities. But simultaneously, I was interested in how his narrative suddenly shifted the focus from masculinity to sexuality.

Teru answered when I asked if his idea of sexuality has ever changed since he came to the U.S., as follows:

Sexuality, or perhaps I should say, something that has changed in me is the idea of gender equality. I became to think about it deeper. For gender equality, I think both men and women should be given opportunities and chances. But I don't think everything is equal. After all, men are stronger in terms of strength and physical power. For example, only women can give birth … this may be a different topic from sexual stuff, but I've come to think about it a lot about that part. Also, because there are more opportunities to see homosexual people since I came to the U.S., now I feel like it's "oh, ok" even though I had a sense of dislike at first, honestly.

Regarding sexuality, Teru expressed that his idea of gender equality has changed. His response demonstrates how sex, gender, and sexuality are interconnected in the everyday context. But simultaneously, his articulation is focused more on equality between men and women (sex equality) and less on gender equality. Moreover, the fact of women's ability to give birth is simply the biology of the human body rather than sex equality. However, unequal power dynamics of how gender norms and roles associated with sex and sexuality are not addressed. Subsequently, he expressed he was disgusted by homosexuals and later

became to *accept* them as he has seen more homosexual people in the U.S. Thus, his narrative denotes the problematic assumption of heterosexuality — binary thinking of sex, gender, and sexuality, which limits complex understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality into the simplistic human experience (Manning, 2015). Cisheteronormativity is communicated through his *sense of dislike* towards homosexual people (i.e., homophobia) and cisgender views of sex and sexuality.

### *Reconfiguring Identity*

In interviewing their experiences of living in-between the Japan-U.S. space, many interviewees expressed that their social identities impact their online dating experiences in many ways. Specifically, the most salient factors they articulated were race/ethnicity and nationality. But simultaneously, my intersectional analytic allowed me to look into how gender and sexuality are closely tied to their narratives about race/ethnicity and nationality. For example, some interviewees reflected how their racial preferences in seeking relationships changed as they moved to the U.S. Matt said, as follows:

> Before I came to the U.S. I never felt attracted to American women or foreign people because I only knew Japanese women when I was in Japan. So, I've seen foreign people on TV but never felt attracted to those people. But after coming to the U.S. and living in Michigan, Yeah, I started to feel attracted to Caucasian women who were in the same school. So yeah, [the preferences] definitely changed after coming to the U.S.

Here, he narrated how his attraction to particular racial/ethnic groups has shifted after he moved to the U.S. In his narrative about racial/ethnic preference, I must reiterate the pervasiveness of cisheteronormativity undergirding his narrative. His heterosexual

199

desire/attraction is always orienting towards women and cisgenderness is assumed as a part of normal gender identity. Moreover, his binary thinking of Japanese/foreign, men/women, and heterosexual/homosexual limits nuanced and complex understandings of race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Especially, his (unconscious) framing of Japanese or foreign coincides with the masculinist and exclusionary construct of Japaneseness and how *white* Japanese maintain their dominance and marginalize foreign people as *Others*. Kinefuchi (2008) asserted that Japaneseness "demarcates the center/margin boundaries between ethnonational Japanese and the other as well as between white others and non-white others" (p. 102; see also, Fujimoto, 2002; Lie, 2001; Russell, 1996). While he became attracted to Caucasian women because he started to live in a state with a predominantly white population, I argue that Japaneseness is systematically evident in his narrative as he only refers to white women, centering/marginalizing boundaries between white others and non-white others. This demarcation associated with his heterosexual desire also further exemplifies his binary thinking which needs to be problematized.

In this vein, his understanding of race in the context of relationship-seeking has had changed based on the dominant female population in the surrounding environment (e.g., geographical location and demographics). But simultaneously, I problematize his cisheteronormative ideology which reinforces binary frameworks in engaging with sexual desire. Thus, his migration to the U.S. gave him an opportunity to reconfigure his understanding of race as well as to reaffirm cisheteronormative gender and sexuality in dating contexts. Similarly, Joe articulated that he was exclusively attracted to Caucasian women as he moved to the U.S., looking for casual sex. These narratives represent the studies of how Caucasian women are often the most desired racial group within the U.S.

racial hierarchy (Tsunokai et al., 2013) and confirm the hegemonic homogeneity of Japaneseness that circumscribes systems of gender and sexuality. The process of reconfiguring race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and nationality is also evident from the first theme of how interviewees feel the sense of being Japanese and a part of the Asian race.

Kuma referred to race as culture and sharing Asian cultures is important in looking for his potential partners in the U.S. Kouki explained, as follows:

Personally, I think race is a big part of my identity amongst other social groups. I know there are a variety of other social groups like men, women, gender groups, social groups, and income groups. But I think race and nationality are important factors, not only being Asian but also being Japanese.

Takumi shared his perspectives, as follows:

To me, nationality is huge and important. Living in the U.S., my identity of being Japanese has been a key. So, in online dating too, being Japanese has affected me a lot. If I recall people I've dated, I can't think of anyone who wasn't interested in Japan at all. Rather than they were interested in Asia or love Asia or dating with me because I'm Asian, my nationality played a huge role in building rapport with them. I feel like being Japanese had a lot more impact than being Asian in online dating.

As represented by narratives of Kouki, Kuma, and Takumi, race/ethnicity and nationality are important social identities in online dating. Simultaneously, I highlight their significance to race/ethnicity and nationality are sustained by the unquestioned cisheteronormativity. Before articulating their importance in racial/ethnic and national identity, they are cisgender and heterosexual men whose sexual desire is (or, must be) oriented towards cisgender women. While their narratives illustrate the nuances of their identity of simultaneously being

Japanese and Asian in the U.S. space, their cisheterosexuality is a thoroughly fixed and normalized identity. For Kuma, he articulated the racial diversity in the U.S. and being racialized as Asian led to a meaningful signification for him to build connections with other Asian ethnicities. Kouki felt that race is an important factor because he has been living in the U.S. as an Asian man and communicating with people from diverse racial backgrounds. But simultaneously, nationality and being Japanese are also essential. Takumi highlighted how his Japanese identity and nationality became a significant element through his experience of becoming Asian in the U.S. Here, both Kouki and Takumi's narratives illustrate their negotiation of racial/ethnic identity in-between *being Japanese* and *becoming Asian* in the U.S. (Sekimoto, 2014). However, their cisheteronormativity remains unquestioned and unshifted as they maintain their (unmarked) cismale heterosexual privilege. Because of their (unmarked) privilege, I contend that the conversations about their gender and sexuality are missing in their narratives.

In reflecting and reconfiguring their own race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality in the U.S., I find what Nakayama (2004) calls *dis/oriented* identity politics pertaining to Asian/Americans (see also, Eguchi, 2015; Sekimoto, 2014; Toyosaki, 2016). As expressed in the second theme, Kuma felt conflicted by being misidentified as a Korean man. This feeling is the materiality of Japaneseness as a masculinist construct, the maintenance of hegemony, superiority, and ethnocentrism. Matt explicitly shared his struggles/difficulty of matching with others, living in the U.S. as an Asian man. Here, I emphasize the discourse of gender and sexuality that Asian men are often feminized and desexualized in the U.S. racialization (Shimizu, 2012). Thus, interviewees' narratives elucidate their *dis/orientation* of race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality as they live in-between Japan and the U.S. spaces

As another example of *dis/oriented* identity, Matt remembered when he was misidentified his ethnic identity, as follows:

> I think other people recognize me as Asian. But I don't mind it because that's who I am. I wasn't concerned about it. But now I look back, because I often get mistaken by Filipino even I put Japanese on the profile, maybe they thought I'm not Japanese or [am] mixed.

In his narrative, he acknowledges that other people recognize him as Asian and conforms to the material reality of being racialized as Asian in the U.S. Even he specifically and intentionally self-present as Japanese in his online dating profiles, he still got mistaken as Filipino. This narrative exemplifies the everyday racialization (i.e., orientation) and desensitization (i.e., disorientation) of Asian ethnicity. Importantly, this *dis/orientation* does not occur as either-or. Rather, they navigate their identities within the spectrum of *dis/orientation* in transnational space. Moreover, I highlight his cisgender heterosexual male gaze associated with his self-consciousness of racialization. He told me that he does not mind being recognized as an Asian man in the U.S. To me, this remark is based on his privileged identity of gender and sexuality. Reflecting back on the existing scholarship, Asian/American women and gay men have been highly gendered and sexualized in the U.S. racial hierarchy. For them, being recognized as Asian women or gay men already insinuates gendered and sexualized implications in the everyday context. Thus, I argue that Matt's expression of "I don't mind [being recognized as an Asian man] because that's who I am" is emerged out of his (unmarked) privilege of gender and sexuality.

Takumi has never thought about being racialized as Asian because of his occupation as a Japanese language teacher in the U.S. as well as his specified Japanese identity in online

dating profiles. Here, I emphasize his privilege of being Japanese in the U.S. that remained his racialization of ethnicity silent or unquestioned. His absence of thinking about being racialized as Asian also communicates Japanese exceptionalism and hegemonic power that masked the critical issues of racialization in the U.S. Moreover, I emphasize that his cisgender and heterosexual privilege allowed him to be oblivious to the racialization of his identity. Through their narratives, some feel conflicted about being racialized as Asian (or being misidentified their ethnicity), some accept the material reality of racialization, and some do not consciously think about their racialized Asian identity in the U.S. While their feelings of racialization are different, their narratives revealed their (unmarked) cismale heterosexual privileges that are (supposed to be) fixed, stable, and unquestioned.

In addition to their fixed ideologies of gender and sexuality, the sense of being Japanese is one of their fundamental values communicated through the interviews. For example, Matt further expressed, as follows:

I definitely consider myself Japanese very strongly but like as far as understanding culture and be able to assimilate in culture, yes, I feel that I have American culture in me now. Like I understand American way of thinking American society and what it's like, and how to navigate through American society, how to work in the U.S., I have a good understanding and I can adjust to that.

Having lived in Michigan where the population is predominantly white, he said he had to "act more American," especially in his high school age because he feared being disliked or rejected from others by "being different [compared to the majority (white) people]." While he has a strong sense of being Japanese in the U.S., he had to *adjust to* and *assimilate* into American culture in order to live and be accepted in the U.S. Here, the historical continuum

of Asian/American politics of identity and racialization applies to interviewees journey of navigating their racial/ethnic identity as they move to the U.S. (e.g., Eguchi, 2020; Lowe, 1996; Nakayama, 2004; Palumbo-Liu, 1999; Sekimoto, 2014). Therefore, narratives elucidate how interviewees are *dis/oriented* in navigating their racialized Japanese identity, gender, and sexuality in the U.S. context.

As interviewees' narratives demonstrate, race/ethnicity and nationality are noticeable elements in affecting their identity construction and everyday experiences. But at the same time, I find that gender and sexuality are relatively less relevant factors in their narratives because their cismale heterosexual identity remains unmarked and unquestioned. I reiterate the pervasiveness of cisheteronormativity that their cisgender and heterosexual identities are taken for granted ideas and normative practices in their everyday contexts. While interviewees reflected that they became more attentive to racial and sexual diversity by seeing and/or interacting with people of diverse race and sexuality since they moved to the U.S., the understanding of their own gender and sexuality is often overlooked in their narratives. As an important finding, interviewees' cisgender heterosexual identity is always undergirding their understandings of race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, and binary frameworks are reproduced and reinforced (LeMaster, 2015).

For example, Kuma expressed his (hetero)sexuality that, "I'm a man, so I like women as [romantic/sexual] partners. I don't know what to say, I've never thought about it." He also expressed that "Nowadays, because there are too many categories like LGBT, I don't really know about it. It's hard to catch up." Here, his struggles reflecting on his (hetero)sexuality and understanding non-heterosexual identities because there are "too many categories" embody the centricity and problematic constitution of heterosexuality which limit the

complex understandings of sexuality. Moreover, his cisgender identity is already assumed as the norm and binary frameworks such as men/women and heterosexual/homosexual guide his cisheteronormative and heterosexist remarks. Yusuke asked me in the interview that "I guess I'm not really understanding the word [sexuality] … can you clarify a little bit? I've never thought about it that much." In this case, his lack of understanding of the word *sexuality* is not because he does not have enough language proficiency in English to comprehend it. He has been living in the U.S. since 2016 and had completed his master's degree in U.S. higher education. Hence, he is not entirely new to the notion of sexuality; however, he has never thought about the idea itself and had trouble understanding its meaning of it. These narratives showcase the embodiment of cisheteronormativity, centralized cisgender identity and heterosexuality as fixed and the norm in their everyday experiences. With their cismale and heterosexual privilege, nuanced understandings of gender and sexuality are missing and their privileged positionality remains unquestioned.

Alongside the assumed cismale heterosexual identity, it is important to note that class was not explicitly mentioned in their narratives. However, as I engage with their narratives intersectionally, I assert class is a fundamental factor in affecting their understandings of identity and online dating experiences. For example, their international mobility is sustained by their financial stability to move to the U.S. and pursue their education and professional career. Studying abroad requires one to be responsible for paying expensive tuition with or without a scholarship. Some interviewees already have job stability with holding temporary or permanent visas in the U.S. In this vein, while they are only allowed to study or work under a certain visa or immigration status, their international mobility and financial stability insinuate their privileged positionality of class.

While class was not explicitly mentioned in the interviewees' narratives, Teru made a connection between gender and class through his articulation of *otoko rashii* in developing long-term relationships in online dating*,* as follows:

About the idea of *otoko rashii,* … I think of protecting, supporting, and providing women financially. I think it this way because I've seen and noticed families will be happy if they have money. I've seen married couples and children fighting when the husband is low-income, so, that part is huge to me.

In his narrative, financial stability is a key aspect to be masculine in interpersonal and family contexts, and the meaning of happiness for the family is driven by financial status. Here, Teru's belief of masculinity is guided by the primary mechanism of capitalist society. This mechanism of capitalism maintains the superiority of men over women through the enforcement of higher wages for men and lower wages for women, further reinforcing inequal and imbalanced power of gender roles (e.g., women depending on men, domestic divisions of labor, and superiority of men in the labor market). Moreover, his desire for a (better) financial status communicates the discursive practice of whiteness, the middle-to-upper class aesthetics and its centricity. As Villaverde (2000) referred to whiteness as "a systemic ideological apparatus that is used to normalize civility, … impose middle-class values and beliefs with an assumption of a heterosexual matrix" (p. 46), Teru's narratives about gender and class reify the dominant social structures of capitalism and whiteness. Importantly, his narrative showcases his cisheteronormative life path such as marriage, reproduction, and fatherhood associated with capitalism.

Overall, interviewees' narratives illuminated that their moving experiences to the U.S. gave them opportunities to gain awareness and think about their race/ethnicity, gender,

sexuality, and nationality. But simultaneously, their feelings of struggle to answer questions about social identities insinuated their unmarked privilege as the dominant cisgender heterosexual men. Their understandings of social identities have (un)shifted in the process of navigating through the U.S. society and structures of power such as whiteness, hegemonic masculinity, cisheteronormativity, and capitalism. As their narratives reify such a dominant matrix of power, identity layers of gender, sexuality, and class are often un/consciously overlooked or taken for granted under their (unmarked) privilege in their everyday experiences.

### Rethinking Online Dating Space

In addition to their shifting understandings of race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, some interviewees expressed how their impressions of online dating itself have changed since they moved to the U.S. and participated in online dating apps. Kouki shared the changes in his impression of online dating apps, as follows:

I thought online dating apps are unexpectedly safe. I mean, unexpectedly reliable. I've met with girls who are like something suspicious, like a fraud. Also, I cannot help but think girls who are participating in online dating apps are like, I have images of them being too dependent on romantic relationships and hysteric. But [after started using the apps,] I found out there are surprisingly many people who are chill. So, I am now started to feel like online dating apps are safe to use if I want to be in a long-term relationship. Also, when I used Tinder for the first time, my American colleague in my previous job got married to a woman who he met through the online dating app, so I had that memory a little bit in my head. So, I remember I didn't have much resistance to participating in online dating apps when I got introduced to them.

208

In his narrative, he not only did mention his impressions of online dating but also articulated certain perceptions toward female online dating users that they are *too dependent* and *hysteric* in romantic relationships. These contemptuous images associated with female users communicate the problematic labeling of women and femininity (e.g., Meyer et al., 2011). Although his perceptions toward female users gradually changed as he interacted with a variety of women in online dating apps, images of female users as *suspicious*, *fraud*, *too dependent*, and *hysteric* led him to feel that online dating apps are not a safe space for seeking romantic/sexual relationships.

On the note of safety concerns, I find Kouki and other interviewees' narrative important to highlight the cultural implications of online dating in Japan which affected their participation in the apps in the U.S. Teru told me about his experience, as follows:

When I was an undergrad in Japan, I used to work part-time for a short term as a shill for what we used to call *deai-kei saito* (出会い系サイト [matchmaking sites]) or *deai-kei apuri* (出会い系アプリ [matchmaking apps]). Because of that experience, I've used to think that there are only scams in *deai-kei saito.*

Kuma shared his concerns, as follows:

At the time when online dating apps first appeared, there were incidents like a Japanese woman who were studying abroad who got killed by a foreign person she met in *deai-kei apuri.* So, I had bad impressions of *deai-kei saito* and hesitation to use it. I started using the apps after a while once the online dating became more popular. I considered about the safety and started using it.

While interviewees eventually started using online dating apps once online dating itself became a relatively popular practice in seeking relationships, Teru and Kuma's narratives

illuminate the issues of trust and safety. Kuma was and is still concerned about the safety

issue pertaining to the online dating platform because it might be used as a space for scams,

and it is possible for users to fake pictures and profiles as Teru shared his experience of

working as a shill. Especially, their use of terms such as *deai-kei apuri* (出会い系アプリ

[matchmaking apps]) and *deai-kei saito* (出会い系サイト [matchmaking sites]) signifies

culturally specific implications behind the online dating space and practices in Japan.

In a Japanese cultural context, seeking heterosexual romance through online dating

constitutes somewhat risky and dangerous connotations. For example, the term *deai-kei* has

been used for *online dating sites* in Japan since the late 1990s and the early 2000s; however,

this term and the online dating space have historically, culturally, and socially not been

accepted or considered as taboo in Japan because of the increased cases of sexual assault,

prostitution (e.g., *enjo kousai* [援助交際]), and crimes associated with them (Farrer & Gavin,

2009; Holden & Tsuruki, 2003). Japan's online dating space, *deai-kei* and its heterosexist

qualities must be problematized. Importantly, Japan's online dating space is historically

exclusive to heterosexual relationships and elucidates Japan's problematic patriarchal system

and sexism. As studies examined, women are often harassed and oppressed by men in

Japan's online dating space. It eventually became a cultural taboo space because male

dominance and sexism were socially recognized and normalized in such space.

Like Kuma, I also grew up learning about the online dating space by watching and

reading national news talking about the risks and crimes related to *deai-kei*. Therefore, until I

came to the U.S. for pursuing my graduate degrees, my understanding of online dating had

been a space where it is a dangerous, embarrassing, and taboo platform to seek heterosexual

romantic relationships. This exemplifies how sexism and discrimination, particularly against

cisgender women, are normalized in Japan's heterosexual online dating space. With the increasing popularity of online dating, there has been an industrial marketing strategy of applying *matching apuri* (マッチングアプリ [literally, matching app]) as an alternative term for indicating online dating in Japan to be socially more acceptable than *deai-kei saito/apuri*. Teru's narrative demonstrates how the online dating sites/apps used to be called as *deai-kei saito/apuri* and he used the term *matching apuri* for referring to online dating apps throughout the interview. In fact, other interviewees also used the term *matching apuri* in their narratives instead of saying *deai-kei saito/apuri*. By their use of the term *matching apuri*, I find the cultural shift of rebranding online dating apps and spaces to be a socially acceptable platform for heterosexual relationship-seeking. Here, I also highlight that their use of *matching apuri* insinuates cisheteronormativity as the word *matching* here means the match between cisgender men and women.

Moreover, Matt's narrative further highlighted the cultural implications and impacts of religion in online dating contexts.

> I felt fortunate that I was able to meet with my wife through online dating. Being a Christian, sometimes some Christian people may look down on online dating. Now I think it's changing but back then was still like this perception that online dating is for some of you just want to play around. So, it was a little bit hard for me to share openly that I'm using online dating sites. But after I met my wife, I didn't hide to anyone. … I'm not sure for women too. Maybe some [women] are not comfortable sharing that they did online dating sites. Maybe sometimes guys are easier to say about doing online dating than women because I think it gives perception that the

211

woman is, you know, sleeping around or something for some people. So maybe for

women is harder to share.

He explained how his religious belief as a Christian affected his online dating experiences. Specifically, I reiterate heterosexism working with Christianity in oppressing women. He used to hesitate to share that he was using online dating apps to seek long-term relationships because, in his Christian community, online dating users were looked down upon. In his experience within the community, participation in online dating had connotations of unfaithful heterosexual relationship building such as casual, uncommitted, and non-monogamous sexual relationships. With his religious identity, cisheteronormativity is undergirded in his articulation of men/women and superior/inferior binaries in his narrative. Moreover, it is important to note that his assumption demonstrated the social stigma associated with gender in online dating from his religious perspectives that women may receive a more harmful reception than men for participating in online dating. This stigma communicates the male superiority of agency and imbalanced systems of power against women in online dating participation. This sexism and discrimination against women in relation to Christianity and the online dating space must be problematized.

In further rethinking the online dating space, interviewees' narratives illuminated the im/possibility of online dating. Takumi reflected that the online dating space gave him opportunities to meet with people outside of the campus community. Working as a Japanese language teacher at the four-year college, he said it has been difficult to find romantic/sexual partners because people he meets everyday are usually students and coworkers within the department and/or the institution. He hesitates to develop intimate relationships with students and coworkers from a moral and ethical standpoint because workplace romance may create

212

potential conflict in personal and professional contexts (Wilson, 2015). Thus, online dating apps were the space of possibility and a realistic option for him to find potential partners outside the realm of his workplace and occupational boundaries.

He also mentioned his experiences of trying out group dating and the filter function which he felt those tools expanded the possibility of matches. Group dating is becoming an increasingly popular style of relationship building which entails a night out for a group of singles, hoping to develop romantic relationships. He felt that group dating might be useful to meet with a variety of people and find friends who can simply hang out or casually grab drinks with. However, he stressed that it does not mean the relationship can/will develop into the romantic/sexual one. Along with the group dating experience, he expressed that the filter function can solidify or narrow down the potential matches based on preferences and common interests. But simultaneously, he has complicated feelings about this filter tool because it automatically eliminates the possibility of matching with people who you have not thought it would be a good match. Takumi's feeling highlights the nuanced experiences of participating in online dating which can extend and limit the possibility of finding matches. Thus, depending on the design of the apps, it can be im/possible space for users to find matches and develop relationships.

Moreover, Teru's online dating experiences exemplified how the online dating platform affects the way he understands his identity. For example, through having conversations with his Hong Kong girlfriend who he met in the online dating app, he became to think seriously that he must get closer to his images of the ideal man and father. The online dating space became an opportunity for him to strengthen his cisheteronormative sexual desires and life paths. In this vein, normative assumptions and expectations of gender

213

and (hetero)sexuality such as hegemonic masculinity (i.e., ideal manhood and fatherhood) and cisheteronormativity (i.e., marriage and reproduction) are further promoted through his participation in online dating apps. Thus, the online dating space simultaneously serves as a possibility to reconfigure one's identity and an impossibility to destabilize the centrality of hegemonic masculinity and cisheteronormativity.

### *Reflective Summary*

In this theme, I focused on analyzing their narratives situated within the liminal space in-between Japan and the U.S. Their transnational journey of moving to the U.S. from Japan and experiences in online dating apps indicated their unmarked privileges, processes of reconfiguring identity, and engagement in rethinking the online dating space.

First, interviewees' reactions to the questions about race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality insinuated the privileged positionality of being in the dominant group of societies that are not explicitly reflected in their narratives. Specifically, they expressed difficulty in answering the questions of race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality because they have never or thoroughly thought about their identities before coming to the U.S. As *nihonjin* (日本人), they have lived in Japan as the dominant Japanese, belonging to the racial/ethnic majority within the homogenous discourse of Japan as a country with one race. Their narratives not only did elucidate their privilege of not having to question their race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, but also reified discursive practices of Japaneseness and whiteness which maintain the racial hierarchy – specifically in relation to white superiority and anti-blackness. Their identity as *nihonjin* was further emphasized through the self-presentation and interactions with others in-between Japan and the U.S. space.

Moreover, their ambiguity in responding to the questions of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality revealed their unmarked privilege as cisgender and heterosexual Japanese/Asian men. As some interviewees explained, being heterosexual is *futsuu* (普通) and heterosexuality is embodied as a fixed and stable category. Importantly, their cisgenderness and heterosexuality are always assumed as normative identities (LeMaster, 2015). Therefore, their narratives coincide with the dominant discourses of power such as hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy, and cisheteronormativity.

Second, the interviewees' transnational experiences in-between Japan and the U.S. illuminated their negotiation for reconfiguring identity. For example, after moving to the U.S. and participating in online dating apps, some interviewees expressed their negotiation of identity through the U.S. racial system between *being Japanese* and *becoming Asian* which also elucidated gender and sexuality systems. Some explained that being Japanese (i.e., race/ethnicity and nationality) became the most important part of identity through their unquestioned privilege of being cisgender heterosexual men. Some articulated their *dis/oriented* Japanese identity which needed to be assimilated as Asian in the U.S. society. In the process of reconfiguring their identity, their narratives insinuated gender, sexuality, and class as relatively less salient factors under the unmarked cisheteronormative privilege. Importantly, the centrality of cisgender identity and heterosexuality is further confirmed, and class was not explicitly communicated, yet emerged as a significant element associated with their intersecting identities of race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and nationality.

Lastly, narratives elucidated the im/possibility of the online dating space. For many interviewees, there were culturally specific and problematic connotations associated with the online dating space such as normalized heterosexism and discrimination. They eventually

started using the apps in rethinking the online dating space that can expand the possibility to find romantic/sexual partners. But simultaneously, narratives illuminated the reality of difficulty in matching or developing romantic/sexual relationships in online dating apps for Japanese men through the design of the apps (e.g., filter function and preference settings). Moreover, the online dating space became opportunities for some interviewees to further become aware of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality while reifying and reinforcing the dominant systems of power such as hegemonic masculinity and cisheteronormativity. Thus, the online dating space simultaneously extends the possibility of relationship-seeking and the impossibility of destabilizing the centricity of power such as cisheteronormativity pertaining to U.S.-based Japanese men, limiting the flexible or fluid understandings of social identities.

# CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, I have documented and examined U.S.-based Japanese men's narratives about their day-to-day experiences in and across online dating contexts. Through the analysis of their understanding of their *selves* and intercultural interpersonal interactions with others in online dating apps, I have elucidated intersecting politics of identity, culture, and space/place pertaining to cisgender heterosexual Japanese men. Specifically, theoretical frameworks (i.e., social institutions of whiteness and racialized gender, [hetero]sexuality, and relationalities) and methodological frameworks (i.e., intersectionality and critical reflexivity) of this study have allowed me to centralize embodied experiences and to critique how multilayered differences (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and more) working with dominant social structures affect interviewees' everyday experiences within the spectrum of power, privilege, and marginalization. Importantly, these analytics have guided me to reveal naturalized and universalized structures of existing power relations such as whiteness, patriarchy, cisheteronormativity, and capitalism.

In this discussion and conclusion chapter, I showcase a brief synopsis of each chapter, theoretical/methodological reflections, limitations and future directions, and the conclusion of this research. Specifically, I closely reflect on theoretical and methodological challenges in designing this study, engaging with narratives, and analyzing contradicting and relational politics of identity, culture, and space/place. As illustrated in Chapter I, the overarching purposes and goals of this study are to understand U.S.-based Japanese men's online dating experiences and to critique the relationalities of how their narratives emerged from the online dating experiences of Japanese men (i.e., micro-level context) and Japanese men's belief and attitude within and between cultural communities (i.e., meso-level context) allude to the

macro-level structures of power such as whiteness, hegemonic masculinity, and cisheteronormativity. In so doing, this study was guided by four research questions: (1) what are the experiences of Japanese men participating in heterosexual online dating? (2) how do Japanese men present their identities and make sense of their identity presentations in online dating? (3) how do transnational transitions to the U.S. shape Japanese men's experience of online dating through living in the liminal space? (4) how do U.S.-based Japanese men's dating experiences alter, shape, and reify racialized gender and sexual politics associated with ongoing sociohistorical issues of Asian/American identities? These questions guided the research design and development of this project and allowed me to better make sense of and critique the challenges, contradictions, and relationalities of U.S.-based Japanese men's experiences in and across everyday contexts. These questions also oriented the structures of the rest of the chapters.

Chapter II highlighted the brief historical backgrounds and trajectories of Japanese im/migration in the U.S., discourses on Asian/American gender and sexuality, and the online dating space. Moreover, the chapter foregrounded the theoretical frameworks of the study such as social institutions of whiteness and racialized gender, (hetero)sexuality, and relationalities. These theoretical grounds allowed me to showcase the historical and current scholarly conversations about the politics of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality pertaining to Asian/American identities and cultures. Specifically, scholarship of whiteness helped me to emphasize the centrality of imbalanced power structures in and across everyday and online spaces. Racialized gender, (hetero)sexuality, and relationalities underlined the historical continuum of racialized positioning of Asian/American gender and sexuality discourses within the U.S. hierarchy, patriarchy, and cisheteronormativity. For example,

Asian/American men and women have historically been hypo/hypersexualized and their identities are *dis/oriented* within the U.S. context. The theoretical frameworks of this study directed the power-based perspectives in the analysis of narratives. Specifically, queer analytics pushed me to problematize cisheteronormative ideologies and binary thinking of systems of gender, sex, and sexuality embodied in U.S.-based Japanese men's narratives. The lived experiences of Japanese men were not either-or (e.g., masculine or feminine; feminized or not feminized; oriented or disoriented; privileged or marginalized). Rather, their experiences were always within the spectrum. Hence, these frameworks were particularly important to bring out the unmarked and/or invisible privilege and power dynamics such as hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy, ethnocentrism, and cisheteronormativity communicated in interviewees' narratives, examining beyond what was narrated by the interviewees.

In Chapter III, I explained the overall design and procedure of the study as well as my methodological commitment to analyze the narratives. In applying theoretical frameworks presented in Chapter II, I conducted in-depth online interviews in collecting narratives and deployed an intersectional approach and critical reflexivity as my methodology. I interviewed a total of seven U.S.-based Japanese men who are originally from Japan and later came to the U.S. for studying and/or working. The overall length of the interviews was 11 hours 12 minutes. Except for one interview, all the interviews were conducted in Japanese. As a researcher who is fluent both in English and Japanese, I was responsible for translating Japanese into English. For the analysis of the narratives, an intersectional approach allowed me to critique how interlocking relations of power and domination shape socially constructed categories of differences (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality). Critical reflexivity guided me to account for my own privilege and reflect on my relationships with the

interviewees and their narratives in the analysis. Thus, my methodological commitment stressed the ethical responsibility as a critical scholar to situate my body and challenge structures of power that are often invisible within the studied texts. Through the explained method and methodology with underlining theoretical grounds, three themes emerged from the analysis of narratives that are presented in Chapter IV.

In Chapter IV, I documented and analyzed the interviewees' narratives. Overall, three themes emerged from the analysis: (1) *Feeling Un/Attractive: Narratives of Racial/Ethnic, Gender, and Sexual Accounts in Online Dating*, (2) *Feeling Proud: Japanese Exceptionalism and Nationalism in Online Dating*, and (3) *Feeling Transnational: Shifting Identities in Online Dating*. Overall, the problematic rhetoric and embodiment of cisheteronormativity were extremely pervasive in narratives throughout the interviews. Specifically, their cisgender, heterosexual, and dominant *white* Japanese privileges were taken for granted and not explicitly articulated in their narratives. Thus, using intersectional and reflexive approaches to interview and queer analytics in my analysis, I continuously challenged the sociohistorical continuum of power such as whiteness, patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and cisheteronormativity in and across the themes in order to complicate the understandings of Japanese men's race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.

The first theme answered the first and fourth research questions. The interviewees' narrative illustrated their overall feelings and experiences of participating in online dating apps and elucidated how their racial/ethnic, gender, and sexual accounts are informing and/or informed by the dominant structures of power. Specifically, their narratives revealed their feelings of struggling to match with other users in online dating apps. Moreover, this theme illuminated how their understanding of race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality reify the ongoing

sociohistorical issues of Asian/American identities as well as the dominant matrix of power such as hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy, and cisheteronormativity. The second theme answered the second research question. Specifically, the narratives demonstrate their self-presentation and understanding of their senses/values of being Japanese. My analysis exposed the undergirded masculinist and cisheteronormative notions of Japaneseness, Japanese nationalism, ethnocentrism, and exceptionalism communicated through the interviewees' narratives. The third theme answered the third and fourth research questions. In this theme, I underscored their unmarked privilege as cisgender heterosexual Japanese men in-between Japan-U.S. spaces. Importantly, I looked into how their perceptions of social identities and online dating platforms have shifted as they moved to the U.S. in the transnational context.

Through the brief synopsis of each chapter, I underlined the overall design, framework, and findings of the study. In the next section, I reflect on theoretical and methodological implications and how I engaged with the guiding theoretical/methodological frameworks in developing this research.

**Theoretical Reflections**

As elaborated in Chapter I, this study situates social institutions of whiteness and racialized gender, (hetero)sexuality, and relationalities as theoretical frameworks in unpacking U.S.-based Japanese men's online dating experiences. Their narratives illuminated the often unheard and overlooked voices and feelings of Japanese men in the online dating space. These frameworks effectively guided my analysis of the narratives in relation to the ongoing scholarly conversations of Asian/American identities, Japaneseness, and systems of

gender and sexuality. In this section, I reflect on the challenges of applying these theoretical frameworks as I engaged with the interviewees' narratives.

### *Social Institutions of Whiteness*

The theoretical framework of social institutions of whiteness helped me to identify and evaluate the discursive practices of *white* power that are embodied through U.S.-based Japanese men's narratives. Specifically, the centricity of whiteness is always maintained and (re)centered in interviewees' everyday experiences. Moreover, whiteness allowed me to look into the relationality with Japaneseness. While whiteness and Japaneseness are not equivalent and culturally, conceptually, and ideologically different, I find similarities in their authority and privilege that affect Japanese men's everyday experiences. For example, Teru's narrative about self-presenting himself as a *100% pure Japanese* literally highlighted the dominant *pure* (*white*) Japanese identity as the status quo through the homogenizing and hegemonic discourses of Japaneseness. Here, I indicated the superiority of *pureness* and dominant positionality with the discursive embodiment of *white* power. Narratives from other interviewees also denoted how whiteness and Japaneseness work together to reinforce their senses/values of being Japanese, ethnocentrism, Japanese exceptionalism, and national/istic thinking. These reinforced senses/values insinuate how whiteness *travels* and *glocalizes* its systems of domination and centrality of power (Asante, 2016; Shome, 1999; Suganuma, 2012). Thus, the theoretical framework of social institutions of whiteness allowed me not only to examine Japanese men's experiences through the U.S. context but also to elucidate the discursive practices of *white* power in the transnational space.

One of the challenges of applying social institutions of whiteness in this study was reflecting and acknowledging my own privilege connected to white power and white social

order which maintain and reproduce domination and marginality. For example, I challenged interviewees' unmarked privilege — social capital and global mobility associated with their educational background, socioeconomic status, linguistic ability, and Japan-U.S. political alliance. However, as I engage with their narratives, I begin to see the implications of my privilege. I often got stuck in the dilemma of questioning interviewees' positionality while I am also embodying it. For example, I problematized interviewees' fixed ideas and embodiments of cisgender and heterosexual identity. But simultaneously, I do, too, self-identify as cisgender and heterosexual by using these fixed categorizations of gender and sexuality. This means, I am already contributing to the maintenance of normative systems of gender and sexuality, receiving benefits through the dominant social structures of patriarchy and cisheteronormativity. Here, this is where an intersectional approach and critical reflexivity guided me to push further in calling out their privilege while critically reflecting on myself as a researcher engaging with their narratives. Some interviewees expressed that getting married, having children, and starting a family are parts of their life plans. While I challenge that these ideas/acts are cisheteronormative, I also realize such life paths (e.g., marriage, reproduction, family, and kinship) are culturally and socially engrained as normal and ideal when I think of my own future. Thus, I critique the pervasiveness of cisheteronormativity through interviewees' narratives as well as my privilege that continues to sustain its dominance and centricity. In this way, the theoretical framework of social institutions of whiteness through an intersectional approach and critical reflexivity allowed me to closely analyze the centricity of power communicated through the interviewees' narratives as well as acknowledge my privileged positionality that is central to my identity.

***Racialized Gender, (Hetero)Sexuality, & Relationalities***

The theoretical framework of racialized gender, (hetero)sexuality, and relationality guided my analysis to carefully interrogate the contradicting and relational politics of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality pertaining to Japanese men's online dating experiences. Specifically, this framework allowed me to use queer analytics in elucidating the complex and nuanced subject position of Japanese men within the spectrum of privilege and marginalization. For example, Japanese men are racialized as Asian men within the U.S. racial hierarchy. Their identity becomes *dis/oriented* from *being Japanese* to *becoming Asian* in the transnational space. Some interviewees expressed that they are often recognized as Asian (instead of Japanese) and/or misidentified as non-Japanese Asian ethnicity in and across online dating and everyday contexts since they moved to the U.S.

But at the same time, all interviewees explicitly emphasized their Japanese identity as a strategy to match with other users. Here, queer analytics helped me to unpack important implications of gender and sexuality through their racialized *dis/orientation* of identity. For example, mirroring Asian/American scholarship, Japanese men's masculinity is often feminized which leads to their feelings of a lack of masculinity, struggle to match, and being undesirable within the hegemonic masculinity. But simultaneously, Kouki's expression of *ii-imi de otoko-rashiku nai* (良い意味で男らしく無い [not masculine but in a good way]) insinuated Japanese masculinity associated with feminine traits that counters hegemonic masculinity. Moreover, their senses/values of being Japanese denoted the masculinist and nationalist construct of Japaneseness working with ethnocentrism, exceptionalism, and patriotism. But still, the white masculine idealism was salient in their narratives, reifying the values of cisheterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity as the normal and ideal factors for constituting, maintaining, and reinforcing manhood.

224

Thus, this theoretical framework guided me to examine the implications of racialized gender and sexuality in U.S.-based Japanese men's narratives. I used queer analytics to problematize hegemonic masculinity and cisgender heterosexuality as fixed identities. While Japanese men are racialized, gendered, and sexualized within the U.S. social structures, they are cisgender and heterosexual men who always benefit from the maintenance and reproduction of cisheteronormative ideologies and practices that must continuously be problematized. In this vein, queer analytics played crucial roles in intervening and destabilizing the embodiment of cisheteronormativity that is pervasive in interviewees' narratives.

Reflecting on the application of this theoretical framework, I must confess that I have struggled using a queer analytic (i.e., Queer Intercultural Communication) in further complicating interviewees' narratives. As I developed the manuscript of this study, I realized that my analysis often lacks the ethical and political commitment as a critical cultural communication scholar to question interviewees' cisheteronormative and sexist remarks in their narratives which needed to be problematized. For example, I acknowledge that this is the missing context through my cisgender and heterosexual biases ignored or overlooked to unpack the reified power through the narratives. One of the reasons why I hesitated or struggled using a queer analytic was my cishetero views of approaching *queer* as just a noun (i.e., non-heterosexual gender/sexual being). However, it is not simply a gender/sexual category. Rather, *queer* is "both a noun (e.g., being) and a verb (e.g., doing)," a powerful political tool to destabilize and dismantle binary and cisheteronormative structures of gender, sex, and sexuality (Yep et al., 2020, p. 20). Thus, it has been a challenge for me to deploy

*queer* as not only a noun but also as a verb, academic and political tool to challenge cisheteronormativity.

Truthfully, I remain struggling with what *queer* means. Especially, I do not want to appropriate the act of *queering* as simply a convenient name to critique cisheteronormativity through my cisgender heterosexual identity. I often asked myself, can I use *queer* while being a cisgender heterosexual man? However, I begin to develop a better understanding that *queer* is merely a gender and sexual category, it is a political act and identity to destabilize and problematize heteronormative practices, performances, embodiments, and ideologies. For example, I queered cisheteronormativity communicated through the U.S.-based Japanese men's narratives such as the normalized and idealized notion of masculinity and cisheteronormative life paths of getting married, having children, and starting a family. Therefore, the theoretical framework of racialized gender, (hetero)sexuality, and relationalities was particularly important in analyzing intersecting politics of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality as well as checking my privileged views and practices of a queer analytic.

**Methodological Reflections**

This study deployed intersectionality and critical reflexivity as the methodology for examining interviewees' narratives. Similar to the reflections on theoretical frameworks above, I also elaborate on methodological challenges I came across as I conducted this study. Specifically, I highlight the challenges in interview processes and analysis of narratives.

*Interview Processes*

I reflect that the choice of interview method (i.e., an in-depth online and semi-structured interview) met the purposes and goals of the study. However, I have experienced

226

some technical challenges in the process of collecting narratives. First, recruiting participants for this study was difficult through my limited network of cisgender heterosexual U.S.-based Japanese men. My participants had a similar difficulty finding someone who meets the criteria for participating in this study. For example, I personally know many cisgender heterosexual U.S.-based Japanese women. My interviewees also told me "女性なら知り合いに何人かいるんですが (I know some women [who are cisgender heterosexual U.S.-based Japanese] though)" Moreover, including myself, participants were not sure whether their friends or acquaintances have participated in online dating or not because such experiences are not usually shared. Therefore, even with the snowball sampling strategy, the limited accessibility to cisgender heterosexual U.S.-based Japanese men who meet the criteria was a challenge to recruit participants.

In addition to the accessibility, I understand that sharing online romantic/sexual experiences is an intimate and delicate interaction. For example, people may have experienced emotionally difficult or draining relationships through online dating that they do not want to share with other people. Moreover, I have met with most of the participants for the first time through mutual friends. This means, it may be difficult for some people to openly share intimate and delicate experiences of online dating with a stranger. Thus, finding potential participants who are willing to share their online dating experiences might have been another difficulty because of the emotional commitment or involvement associated with their participation in this study.

Second, the processes of transcribing and translating were extremely time-consuming and challenging. In this study, except for one interview in English, all interviews were conducted in Japanese. I had prior knowledge of how the transcription of narratives can be a

time-consuming process; however, translating approximately 10 hours of narratives from Japanese to English was beyond my imagination in terms of the volume of narratives and time. For example, I first transcribed the audio recordings of the interviews. I played and stopped the recording per sentence which took me hours to maintain the accuracy of what have been narrated by the interviewees. Oftentimes, I had to rewind words, sentences, and paragraphs so that I make sure the transcription of their narratives is correct. Then, I translated their narratives from Japanese to English sentence by sentence. Thus, completing the transcription and translation processes took several days per interview text. Moreover, in the process of translating, I realized that I may have lost some meaningful nuances of conversations with interviewees (e.g., back and forth interactions, nods, laughs, and attitudes) and their ways of speaking (e.g., fillers, spaces between words and conversations, tones, and pitch). Some interviewees used a lot of fillers such as *etto-* (えっとー) and *sono-* (そのー) which are relatively equivalent for *uh* and *hmm* in their narratives. Some words and phrases in Japanese could not fully be translated into English. As I was responsible for the translating matter, I understand there is no *perfect* way to transcribe/translate such nuances and colloquial expressions. Thus, it was another challenge that I had to make some decisions to choose specific words and/or expressions to translate their voices and feelings in this study.

*Analysis Processes*

It was also challenging for me to carefully use intersectionality and critical reflexivity during the process of analyzing interviewees' narratives. As underlined in the literature in Chapter III, intersectionality is a powerful analytic tool that allows researchers to look into contradicting and relational layers of identities within the spectrum of privilege and marginalization. Moreover, critical reflexivity is an ethical responsibility for researchers to

228

take their own bodies into account in the analysis of texts. While these are the core methodological approaches in this study, I reflect that I have struggled to carefully commit to these methodological grounds. When I analyze the narratives, I noticed that I tend to separate race/ethnicity and gender/sexuality as isolated entities. Here, I critically reflect on my cisheteronormative view that often made discourses of gender and sexuality invisible in issues of race and ethnicity. In this vein, there were many points I needed to expand and elaborate on in order to conduct in-depth analyses through an intersectional analytic. For example, I tend to discuss Japaneseness as a gender/sexuality-less notion which is problematic. However, an intersectional approach helped me to elucidate the masculinist, patriarchal, and cisheteronormative constructions of Japaneseness in addition to racial/ethnic discourses. Specifically, carefully highlighting the historical context, power, and its relation to intersecting layers of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality was a key to avoid the separation between discourses of race/ethnicity and gender/sexuality.

At the same time, deploying critical reflexivity in the process of analyzing narratives was another methodological challenge. Specifically, I learned the difficulty of *actually* accounting for my body as a researcher interacting with the narratives while conducting analyses. As I engage with interviewees' narratives, I noticed my tendency of detaching myself from their voices and experiences. I reflect that this is because I often feel un/consciously uncomfortable sharing pieces of myself in my writing through acknowledging and admitting my own privilege and ignorance to the missing contexts that need to be interrogated in the analysis. I often described and interpreted their narratives as an objective observer rather than inserting my own perspectives and experiences to deepen scholarly conversations. However, accounting for my body in this study is vital because I am the

producer of findings and analysis based on my interpretation and critique of the interviewees'

narratives, building knowledge as a cultural insider through the insider-within perspective

(Toyosaki, 2011). For example, when unpacking interviewees' understanding of sexuality, I

felt the process of inserting the critical reflection on my own sexuality was uncomfortable. In

problematizing the stability of cisheteronormativity, I struggled to admit that I enjoy hugging

and cuddling with close male friends which are considered as relatively *soft* and less

masculine behaviors in relation to hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality as the status

quo.

  While this critical reflexive process of questioning heterosexuality as a fixed identity

was uncomfortable because of my insecurity of cisheterosexual hegemonic masculinity, the

insertion of my embodied feelings and experiences is an ethical responsibility as a critical

scholar and cultural insider for the knowledge production. Moreover, elaborating on such

uncomfortableness and insecurity of privilege is a crucial process for the academic

commitment to centralize the embodied experiences of the body. Thus, although deploying

an intersectional approach and critical reflexivity as the methodology was particularly

challenging in the process of analysis, it helped me to complicate and enrich the intersecting

politics of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality by situating our bodies (e.g., my researcher's

body and interviewees' bodies) as the central platform in producing knowledge and analysis

in Critical Intercultural Communication research (McIntosh & Eguchi, 2020). These

methodological challenges of intersectionality and critical reflexivity also applied to

theoretical reflections, acknowledging my layers of privilege such as whiteness,

Japaneseness, cismale, heterosexual, social capital, and global mobility. Therefore, making

my unmarked privilege visible and marked as I critique interviewees' narratives was a

challenging task, yet extremely essential process in complicating the understanding of intersecting politics of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class.

**Limitations & Future Research**

In addition to the theoretical and methodological reflections and its challenges, there are several limitations of this study that I must highlight concerning the research design and process. Thus, this section provides limitations of the study that can also be possible directions for future research.

First, as this study exclusively documents and examines narratives from Japanese men, it lacks the consideration of narratives from a diverse population. Specifically, it is important to note that the voices, feelings, and experiences of women, queer, and trans Japanese in online dating apps are missing. There were rich narratives of online dating experiences presented through interviewees' cishetero male perspectives and engagement with other users in online dating contexts. However, how female, queer, and trans Japanese users understand their identities and interact with interviewees could not be analyzed in the narratives in this study. Some interviewees expressed that "I know women would prefer taller men," "I feel that women would not see me as an attractive man," and "I was popular among gay users." These are interviewees' self-perception through the cismale heterosexual gaze of understanding their self. They are certainly important findings in elucidating the interviewees' subjective positionality. But simultaneously, how the matched partners *really* think about such interviewees' self-consciousness as well as the lived experiences of female, queer, and trans Japanese in online dating are remain uncovered. Thus, as a future direction of this study, collecting and engaging with more narratives from male, female, queer, and

trans Japanese would expand the critical scholarship on the heterosexual politics of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.

In addition, all participants of the study were considered as the dominant *white* Japanese who are ethnically what Teru called *100% pure Japanese*. In this vein, voices from hafu Japanese and Japan's ethnic minorities may bring more complex understandings of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality in online dating contexts that can challenge homogenizing and hegemonic discourses of Japaneseness. For example, as a mix-ethnic Japanese (Chinese Japanese), I feel Chinese identity, culture, and people are closely attached to my identity and experiences. Being partially Chinese is also an important part of my identity and culture. Because of these closely tied ethnic relationalities, my decision makings and preferences for the matching processes may be affected in online dating apps. Thus, collecting narratives from non-dominant Japanese would broaden scholarly conversations for the future development of this study.

Subsequently, for the demographics of the participants, this study did not have many limits in terms of participants' age, socioeconomic status, religion, geographical grounds, and relationship statuses. Thus, it would be interesting to collect narratives through a more controlled sampling strategy. For example, selecting particular age groups, geographical bases, language abilities, occupations, religious beliefs, and relationship statuses may generate more in-depth findings and analysis of the U.S.-based Japanese men's identity politics in the online dating context. Moreover, solidifying the criteria for participants based on their goals of using online dating apps would be another consideration for future research because their self-presentation, strategy, and preferences may vary depending on what kind

of goals they want to accomplish in online dating (e.g., short/long-term, casual sex, marriage, non/monogamous relationships, and more).

Second, I reinsert the limitation of translation matter from Japanese to English which is also illustrated in the previous section. Because of culturally specific expressions in Japanese, this study may have left out meaningful implications and nuances of intercultural interpersonal communication through the translating processes. Moreover, I felt the transcribing work has eliminated the tones of how the narratives are expressed by the interviewees. Thus, for future research using interviewing as the method and engaging with narratives, incorporating more detailed notes of how the narratives are told during the interview (e.g., how the interviewee sounds like, uses spaces when speaking, and expresses emotions) would help readers to further visualize interviewees' voices, feelings, and experiences.

Simultaneously, because most of the interviews were conducted in Japanese, writing this study in Japanese (instead of translating it into English) — the native language for the participants of the study and myself — would be a possible direction to decenter the Western/U.S.-centric knowledge production and to dismantle the global and imperial power of English in academia. This may gain accessibility and readership for Japanese scholars and students who are also interested in studying Japanese people's online dating experiences in the transnational context. Moreover, in terms of the method, conducting focus group interviews may provide additional insights into the Japanese men's community experiences to generate future suggestions for policy changes in online dating apps. For example, some designs, settings, and functions of the app may or may not work well for Japanese users.

These findings may benefit online dating companies in improving their services and commitment to diversity, equity, inclusivity, and accessibility in the global market.

Third, while one of the goals of this study is to examine the politics of identity pertaining to Japanese men's online dating experiences, this study could have thoroughly discussed and analyzed the systems and surfaces of media platforms such as the online dating software designs and usages. For example, this study could have looked into how the algorithm intervenes online dating users' interpersonal intercultural communication and romantic/sexual relationships. Moreover, I could have elaborated further on the designs and structures of online dating apps to interrogate the impacts of specific tools and functions attached to the apps. Importantly, this study did not limit any online dating apps which may leave out how different and unique designs of the apps affect users' participation in online dating. In this study, participants used a wide variety of online dating apps such as Tinder, Bumble, EME Hive, Facebook, Match.com, and Pairs. Each app is designed and structured distinctively (with some similarities in terms of featured settings and tools) and how participants decide to use an app over the others may vary depending on their purposes for using the apps. Therefore, as I develop this study in the future, centralizing the role of media interference (e.g., algorithm, platform designs, and services) in participants' online dating experiences would be beneficial to analyze the lived experiences of Japanese men that are specific to particular apps and to expand discourses of new media in Critical Intercultural Communication research.

Moreover, the interconnections between the online and offline dating space can be further interrogated in future research. In this study, I treated interviewees' everyday experiences outside of the online dating space as an important site to examine how

sociohistorical power structures affect their performance of identity in the online dating space. Specifically, their online dating experiences are situated within a space where it is heavily constituted by capitalism and industrialism. Subsequently, matched users may eventually meet each other in the offline dating setting. My analysis showcased how interviewees used *Cool Japan* as a strategy to benefit their identity performance in the apps. Within the underlining capitalistic space, interviewees utilized various forms of their social capital (e.g., English, financial resources, global mobility, and more) in matching processes. However, not many narratives highlighted their experiences of offline dating including the shifting dynamics from the online to offline dating space. Thus, future studies that focus on nuances and differences between the online and offline dating settings are beneficial in further contextualizing the politics of identity performance and space.

Fourth, this study borrowed some knowledge from Queer Intercultural Communication; however, not as a central area of inquiry. Hence, I continue to push a queer paradigm in examining the politics of identity in future Intercultural Communication research. By situating *queer* as a powerful political tool in advocating for social justice, diversity, and inclusivity, I see possibilities in deploying queer analytics as to the main theoretical and methodological framework that would further create new, alternative, and transgressive spaces to problematize patriarchy, cisheteronormativity, and institutionalized and strategic systems of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.

Fifth, centralizing Affect Studies and Performance Studies would be possible future venues to better understand the messiness of online dating interactions, politics of heterosexuality, and romantic/sexual desire. While this study documented interviewees' feelings and emotional expressions in online dating, the politics of emotion and performance

were not thoroughly discussed. As Ahmed (2014) contended that "We need to … think more about what the materials are 'doing', how they work through emotions to generate effects," (p. 19) body politics (e.g., emotion and performance) are still overlooked in Intercultural Communication research. Thus, affective and performative turns would orient this study more closely tied with what McIntosh and Eguchi (2020) asserted as the significance of the body as the central site of knowledge in Intercultural Communication.

**Concluding Thoughts**

The subject group of this study – cisgender heterosexual U.S.-based Japanese men, is culturally specific and I find it is an interesting site of inquiry because their positionality is always within the spectrum of privilege and marginalization. They are often racialized, gendered, and sexualized in the U.S. context while receiving benefits through the dominant social systems of patriarchy and cisheteronormativity in the transnational space. Simultaneously, their lived experiences such as voices, feelings, and narratives in the online dating space are often not thoroughly discussed or still overlooked in Critical Intercultural Communication research. Hence, I believe the findings and analysis of narratives in this study are unique and highlight important conversations about intersecting politics of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality pertaining to U.S.-based Japanese men.

Importantly, the findings and analysis of interviewees' narratives provided some insights about what Japanese means through the historical and current sociocultural and economic contexts. Specifically, I highlighted the relationships between their significance of being Japanese and the historical continuation of the Japan-U.S. alliance. Moreover, Japan's political project of promoting soft power and *cool* images of Japanese identity, culture, and nation-state insinuates Japan's economic imperialism in global contexts. These historical and

current sociocultural, political, and economic relationalities affect the social orders and positionalities of what it means to be Japanese in transnational spaces. In this study, the meaning of being Japanese was communicated through their self-consciousness of Japanese pride, patriotism, and nationalism and how their positionalities are *well-received* in the U.S., coinciding with the political and economic allyship between Japan and the U.S.

By conducting this study, I was strongly reminded of how hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy, and cisheteronormativity continue to sustain and bolster the systemic and strategic matrix of power that affects people's day-to-day experiences. Specifically, U.S.-based Japanese men's narratives highlighted the pervasiveness of unmarked privilege and cisheteronormativity that are already (unconsciously) engrained as parts of their identity in the transnational context. But simultaneously, Japanese men are struggling to match with other users in online dating working with hegemonic masculinity and cisheteronormativity. Grounded in Critical Intercultural Communication, this study also elucidated the historical context and continuum of U.S. racialization, Japan-U.S. diplomacy, and Japanese nationalism through the voices and feelings of Japanese men in the online dating space.

In conclusion, I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the U.S.-based Japanese men who participated in this study. Connecting with one of my personal goals of this research which is to better understand other U.S.-based Japanese men's online dating experiences, I learned that interviewees were also curious about the experiences of other Japanese men. During the interview, some participants asked me "how others are responding to this question?" and "how are their experiences like?" Thus, I hope this study would provide a space for illuminating unique and shared online dating experiences pertaining to U.S.-based Japanese men and for fostering further academic conversations on

intersecting politics of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality in Critical Intercultural Communication.

# APPENDICES

**Appendix A. IRB Approval**

**Appendix B. Consent Form**

**Appendix C. Invitation Email Letter**

**Appendix D. Invitation Flyer**

**Appendix E. Interview Guide**

# Appendix A. IRB Approval

**OFFICE OF THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

| | |
|---|---|
| DATE: | November 4, 2021 |
| | |
| IRB #: | 15021 |
| IRBNet ID & TITLE: | [1814097-3] (Un)Matched: Racialized Narratives of U.S.-Based Japanese Men, Masculinity, and Heterosexuality in Online Dating Apps |
| PI OF RECORD: | Shinsuke Eguchi, Ph.D. |
| SUBMISSION TYPE: | Amendment/Modification |
| | |
| BOARD DECISION: | APPROVED |
| EFFECTIVE DATE: | November 4, 2021 |
| EXPIRATION DATE: | N/A |
| RISK LEVEL: | MINIMAL RISK |
| PROJECT STATUS: | ACTIVE - OPEN TO ENROLLMENT |

DOCUMENTS:
- Advertisement – Recruitment material–flyer (UPDATED: 10/30/2021)
- Advertisement – Recruitment Email (UPDATED: 10/30/2021)
- Amendment/Modification - Amendment Letter (UPDATED: 10/30/2021)
- Application Form - AM Application Form (UPDATED: 10/30/2021)
- Consent Form - Consent Form (UPDATED: 10/30/2021)
- Protocol - Protocol (UPDATED: 10/30/2021)

Thank you for your Amendment/Modification submission. The UNM IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an acceptable risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks to participants have been minimized. **This project is not covered by UNM's Federalwide Assurance (FWA) and will not receive federal funding.**

The IRB has determined the following:

- Informed consent must be obtained and documentation has been waived for this project. To obtain consent, <u>use only approved consent document(s).</u>

This determination applies only to the activities described in the submission and does not apply should any changes be made to this research. If changes are being considered, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to submit an amendment to this project and receive IRB approval prior to implementing the changes. A change in the research may disqualify this research from the current review category. **If federal funding will be sought for this project, an amendment must be submitted so that the project can be reviewed under relevant federal regulations.**

All reportable events must be promptly reported to the UNM IRB, including: UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to participants or others, SERIOUS or UNEXPECTED adverse events, NONCOMPLIANCE issues, and participant COMPLAINTS.

If an expiration date is noted above, a continuing review or closure submission is due no later than 30 days before the expiration date. **It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to apply for continuing review or closure and receive approval for the duration of this project.** If the IRB approval for this project expires, all research related activities must stop and further action will be required by the IRB.

Generated on IRBNet

Please use the appropriate reporting forms and procedures to request amendments, continuing review, closure, and reporting of events for this project. Refer to the OIRB website for forms and guidance on submissions.

**Please note that all IRB records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the closure of this project.**

The Office of the IRB can be contacted through: mail at MSC02 1665, 1 University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131-0001; phone at 505.277.2644; email at irbmaincampus@unm.edu; or in-person at 1805 Sigma Chi Rd. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87106. You can also visit the OIRB website at irb.unm.edu.

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## Appendix B. Consent Form



**(Un)Matched: Racialized Narratives of U.S.-Based Japanese Men, Masculinity, and Heterosexuality in Online Dating Apps**
**Informed Consent for Interviews**
October 1, 2021

**Purpose of the research:**
You are being asked to participate in a research project that is being done by Keisuke Kimura, under the supervision of Dr. Shinsuke Eguchi who is the Principal Investigator, from the Department of Communication and Journalism. The purpose of the research is to complicate the understandings of the lived experiences of U.S.-based Japanese men in online dating. You are being asked to participate because you are between the age 18 and 50, you are a Japanese cisgender heterosexual male who has lived in Japan for a minimum of 12 years before coming to the U.S. and spent time in the U.S. for a minimum of three years, you have participated in online dating at any point of your life, and you are fluent in both Japanese and English. This form will explain what to expect when joining the research, as well as the possible risks and benefits of participation. If you have any questions, please ask one of the project researchers.

**What you will do in the project:**
Your participation will involve an online synchronous video interview via Facetime/LINE/Skype/Zoom. The interview will be audiotaped for the purpose of analysis. The interview should take about up to one hour (unless the participant expresses wanting to extend the time). The interview includes questions such as: what are your general goals of using the online dating apps?; Tell me about your online dating experience in the past; how do people usually understand your racial/ethnic identity in the apps?; How have you ever been influenced by the idea of "being a man" growing up in Japan and the U.S.? and more.

Your participation in this research is *totally voluntary*, and you may choose not to participate. During the interview, you can skip any question that makes you uncomfortable and you can stop the interview at any time.

This dissertation may be published in academic journals or a book. Before my submission, I will send the manuscript to you if you want to ensure that you are represented in a way you hope. If you raise disagreement and/or request clarification, I will correct the manuscript accordingly.

**Risks:**
This project is minimal risk. Specifically, participants may experience emotional stress such as becoming upset and uncomfortable or embarrassed by narrating their past/current stories about their romantic/sexual experiences in online dating. There is minimal risk of possible loss of privacy and confidentiality associated with participating in any research study.

**Confidentiality of your information:**
We will take measures to protect the security of all your personal information, but we cannot guarantee confidentiality of all research data. The University of New Mexico Institutional Review Board (IRB) that oversees human subject research may be permitted to access your records. Your name will not be used in any published reports about this project. The Co-PIs will protect you by conducting all conversations in a safe place. The information you provide in this study is confidential. Your name will not be collected or documented in consent form, audiotape, transcript, or following analysis process. You will choose your pseudonym (nickname) to ensure anonymity in this research. Also, information (e.g., legal names, physical address, work, and/or contact information) identifying your privacy will not be disclosed or collected in the research. All of oral and written data will be stored in the student Co-

PI's laptop, which requires password to log in. To further protect the safety of data, all data will be kept in the document folder, which requires additional password. Confidentiality of any of you who opts to withdraw from the study also will be protected by immediately deleting data collected during your interview. So, your interview will be entirely excluded from this study. After the end of data analysis, all audio recording data will be permanently deleted.

All identifiable information (e.g., your name, email) will be removed from the information collected in this project. After we remove all identifiers, the information may be used for future research or shared with other researchers without your additional informed consent.

**Benefits:**
While no direct benefit will be promised, a direct possible benefit resulting from participating in this study for you to articulate and rearticulate your everyday intercultural interpersonal life experiences as a U.S.-based Japanese cisgender man in the heterosexual online dating space. You may generate a better understanding of your race, gender, sexuality, and relationalities.

**Payment:**
You will not be paid for participating in this project.

**Right to withdraw from the research:**
Your participation in this research in completely voluntary. You have the right to choose not to participate or to withdraw your participation at any point without penalty. During the interview, you can skip any question that makes you uncomfortable and you can stop the interview at any time.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, please feel free to contact:

Dr. Shinsuke Eguchi, Department of Communication and Journalism,
1 University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131.
917-488-8898. seguchi@unm.edu

Keisuke Kimura, Department of Communication and Journalism,
1 University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131.
505-569-9675. kimurak@unm.edu

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or about what you should do in case of any harm to you, or if you want to obtain information or offer input, please contact the UNM Office of the IRB (OIRB) at (505) 277-2644 or irb.unm.edu.

By participating in the interview, you will be agreeing to participate in the above described research.

## Appendix C. Invitation Email Letter

**Email Recruitment**

Subject Line: Opportunity to Participate in Research

Dear x,

I am conducting a research about U.S.-based Japanese men's experiences in online dating apps.

You are receiving this email because your friend y introduced me that you are interested in participating in this study.

The purpose of this study is to better understand how U.S.-based Japanese men experience and navigate their romantic and/or sexual relationships in online dating. Moreover, this research attempts to complicate the ideas of what it means to be a man or masculine and heterosexual. For the purpose of this study, participants in this study must be:

- Between 18 and 50 years old
- Japanese men who have lived in Japan for a minimum of 12 years before coming to the U.S. They should have spent time in the U.S. at the minimum of three years.
- Having experienced participating in the online dating in the U.S. at any point of their life.
- Cisgender men who self-identify as heterosexual and moved to the U.S. to work and/or study.
- Fluent in both Japanese and English.

If you agree to participate, this study will involve an online synchronous video interview via Facetime/LINE/Skype/Zoom. The interview will be audiotaped for the purpose of analysis. The interview should take about up to one hour (unless you would like to extend the time).

This project is minimal risk. Specifically, participants may experience emotional stress such as becoming upset and uncomfortable or embarrassed by narrating their past/current stories about their romantic/sexual experiences in online dating. There is minimal risk of possible loss of privacy and confidentiality associated with participating in any research study.

There is no compensation for participating in this project.

You do not have to be in this study, your decision to be in any study is totally voluntary.

If you feel you understand the study and would like to participate, please let me know by replying to this email.

If you have questions prior to participating, please call, text, or email me at 505-569-9675 or kimurak@unm.edu.

Thank you for your time,

Keisuke Kimura
Ph.D. Candidate
University of New Mexico
Dept. of Communication & Journalism
MSC03 2240, Albuquerque, NM 87131, USA

**Email Recruitment**

kimurak@unm.edu
Pronounce: he/him/his

Principal Investigator: Shinsuke Eguchi, Ph.D.
Study Title: (Un)Matched: Racialized Narratives of U.S.-Based Japanese Men, Masculinity, and Heterosexuality in Online Dating Apps
IRB #: 1814097-1

THE UNIVERSITY OF
**NEW MEXICO.**

## (Un)Matched: Racialized Narratives of U.S.-Based Japanese Men, Masculinity, and Heterosexuality in Online Dating Apps

Seeking people who are
- *Between 18-50 years old*
- *Japanese men who have lived in Japan for a minimum of 12 years and spent time in the U.S. at the minimum of 3 years*
- *Having experienced participating in the online dating in the U.S.*
- *Cisgender men who self-identify as heterosexual and moved to the U.S. to work and/or study*
- *Fluent in both Japanese and English*

This project wants to look at how U.S.-based Japanese men experience and navigate their romantic and/or sexual relationships in online dating.

If you decide to join the project, this study will involve:

- *An online synchronous interview (about 1 hour via Facetime/LINE/Skype/Zoom)*

There is no compensation for participating in this project.

This project is being conducted by Keisuke Kimura, Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Communication & Journalism.

**Contact Information:**
Please email kimurak@unm.edu to get more information or to schedule an interview!

**Appendix E. Interview Guide**

[Ice Breakers]
Any preference on Nickname?
- What is your age, birthplace, and occupation?
- How do you spend your time during most days?
- What are your hobbies and/or interests?
- How do you describe your [race/ethnicity/gender/sexuality and etc.]?
- When did you migrate to the U.S. (or, how long have you been to the U.S.)?
- Tell me your stories about the moving experiences.

[Online Dating Apps]
(Let's dive into the topic of online dating. I am going to ask you about your experiences of using online dating apps.)
- Are you currently active on dating apps, already seeing someone, in a relationship, breaking up, etc.? (This question will influence the tense/phrases [past, present, future] of following questions)
- What are your general goals of using the apps? (e.g., meeting/talking with other people, networking, short/long-term romantic relationship, sexual relationship, etc.) What do you hope to accomplish by using the apps?
  - Do you usually accomplish your goals? Tell me about your experiences.
- Tell me about your online dating experience in the past.
  - When was the first time using online dating apps?
  - What kind of online dating apps have you used?
  - Why did you select those apps?
    - How do you decide on using one app over the other?
    - What features do you particularly like about the apps? Which features don't you like about the apps? Why?
    - If any, what kind of features you wished the apps to have? Why?
- Who (or, what kind of type/personality/ideal of women) do you want to meet in online dating in general? Or, who did you want to meet when you were using online dating apps?
  - Have you been connected or interacted with women of diverse racial, ethnic, national origins, and age groups?
  - Do you have any specific traits that you look for in potential partners/matches when seeking relationships in the apps?
(Let's talking about the matching process in online dating apps.)
- How does (did) the "matching" process work on the apps you (have) used? Do (did) they automatically suggest you the potential matches? Or, do (did) you have an option to browse, select, and filter specific contents? Is (was) it a mix of both? Or, others?
    - What do you think about the "preference" setting on the apps where you can use filter or check boxes to find potential ideal matches?
- What is the matching process look like until you start messaging with each other?
  - Who initiated the messaging? How did it go?
  - How do you decide to message a person?
- Tell me your stories about "matching" experiences.

- o [More specific questions can be:] How were your "matching" experiences (e.g., when you matched, messaged, or met in-person with a person)? Did you come across with any memorable moments? Any gaps or challenges from what originally you have expected before using the apps?
- When participating in online dating, have you ever received any compliments and/or unpleasant comments about you from the matched people?
  - o If so, tell me more in detail about the experience (e.g., who were you talking with, what kind of compliments, how did you feel, and etc.).
- How do you normally use the apps? How does the process look like until you match with someone on the apps?
  - o What do you normally do after you match with someone?
- How have your overall online dating experiences been in the U.S.? Tell me your stories that are memorable to you.

[Self-Presentation & Decision-Making in Online Dating Apps]
(Now, let's talk about how you present yourself in the apps.)
- [If comfortable,] would you walk me through your profile on the dating apps you have used or currently using? What is it look like?
  - o Do you have any strategies for creating your online dating profiles (e.g., selection of profile pictures, writing a short bio, filters, and additional features)?
- Do you have any strategies for communicating with people who you have matched in online dating apps? (e.g., through text message, chat, phone/video call, in-person meeting, and other forms of communication)
- How do you decide whether you want to go on a date with a person you matched with?
- [If you have used more than one dating app before,] have you noticed any similarities and/or differences of the ways in which you present your "self" and communicate with others among those apps?
- Have you ever felt any challenges or difficulties of how you present your "self" in online dating? (e.g., performance, physical features, phenotype, language ability, communication style, and etc.)
  - o Have you felt any gaps between you and what you think of your ideal "self"? If so, what is your ideal "self" look like?

[Race, Gender & Sexuality]
(When we live in the society, there are social categories that determine who we are. For example, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality are our social identities. I am going to ask questions about these social identities and how those are related to your online dating experiences.)
- How do people usually understand your racial/ethnic identity in the apps?
  - o Do you specify/identify your racial/ethnic identity on your profile?
  - o If so, do you self-present as a Japanese or in different ways?
- Have you been identified as an Asian or Asian American in your online dating experience?
  - o How was that experience like? How did you feel about it?

- o Do you think your racial/ethnic identity impact your online dating experiences? How do you think it impacts your experiences? Or, do you think race is an important factor for achieving your goals in online dating?
- In general, how do you see "race"? How do you relate to or interact with others based on your racial identity?
- Has the idea of "race" ever changed after coming to the U.S.?
- What is "masculinity" in your understanding?
- Do you have a particular idea of "男らしい (being a man or masculine)"? What is it?
  - o Where and how did you come to know about "being a man or masculine?
- Growing up in Japan and the U.S., how have you ever been influenced by the idea of "being a man"?
- Has the idea of "being a man or masculine" ever changed after coming to the U.S.?
- In general, have you ever felt that you are "not masculine enough" through your experiences of living in-between Japan and the U.S.? How about in online dating?
  - o If so, in what ways have you felt that you are "not masculine enough"?
- How do you understand any differences in male and female behaviors in online dating?
- Based on your understandings, how do these differences influence your presentation and interactions in online dating?
- Do you think gender identity is an important factor for achieving your goals in online dating? (Explain if needed: Gender identity, I mean their understandings of male and female behaviors and what it means to "be a man" and "be a woman")
- What does "sexuality" mean to you in general? How do you relate to or interact with others based on your sexuality? (Explain if needed: Sexuality can be anything related to sexual condition, interests, expressions, and behaviors)
- What is "heterosexuality" in your understanding?
  - o How do you know that you are heterosexual?
  - o Have you ever been questioned about your sexuality by others? Or have you ever questioned your own sexuality? If so, can you share your experiences?
- Has the idea of "sexuality" ever changed after coming to the U.S.?
- Do you think sexuality is an important factor for achieving your goals in online dating?

(As humans, we have different aspects of identity that make/construct who you are. But very often, one of them is more important to us than others.)

- Do you think your one of the identities is more important to you than other identities in achieving your goals in online dating? Why do you think so? (If needed: For example, do you think your racial/ethnic identity is more important to you than gender and sexual identities when using the apps?)
  - o [If they cannot decide or have no idea,] why do you think it is hard to tell which is more important than the other? How are those identities tied in your online dating experience?
- How do you think your racial/ethnic identity influence how you understanding the ideas of masculinity and heterosexuality in online dating?
- How does your understanding and presentation of masculinity and heterosexuality inform your racial/ethnic identity in online dating?

- How does your understanding and presentation of gender and masculinity inform your sexuality and heterosexuality or vice versa in online dating?

[Wrap-up] (Responses may come back to interview questions that may relate to some research questions)

- Do you have any additional comments or thoughts about your online dating experiences?
- Based on our conversations, do you have any questions or ideas that you would like to address or go back to before we end this session?

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